

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 23, 2007

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Larry Craig
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Feinstein and Ranking Member Craig:

As members who share your commitment to conserving of our nation's wildlife, fish, plants and their habitats, we are writing to urge needed increases in funding for the US Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) endangered species program.

When Congress passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973, it recognized America's obligation to protect its most vulnerable species of wildlife, fish and plants, and to ensure a rich conservation legacy for our children and grandchildren. Unfortunately, we are falling short of that commitment by failing to provide needed funding to protect and adequately recover endangered and threatened plants and animals. The Administration's Fiscal Year 2008 Budget includes a \$5.5 million or 7.5 percent cut from the recovery budget, further exacerbating the existing shortfall. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is in crisis and has lost 600 staff over the last two years. The president's budget will leave wildlife programs in continued deterioration.

Failure to provide adequate levels of funding for endangered species operations will only ensure that species slide closer to extinction, decreasing chances for recovery while increasing the costs. More than 270 species continue to languish on the candidate list, awaiting protection under the Act. Many have been candidates for years. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists have previously estimated that more than 200 already-listed species are on the verge of extinction primarily because too little attention and funding is available for recovery activities. In addition, the number of projects reviewed under the Consultation Program has nearly doubled since 1999 and further increases are expected. The development and implementation of Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs), which allow activities to proceed while still protecting species, continue to grow, with funding critically needed to help ensure timely and effective development and monitoring of 500 existing and more than 300 new HCPs. All ESA program areas are currently experiencing at least a 30 percent vacancy rate, with some offices potentially close to a 50 percent staffing shortfall.

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
The Honorable Larry Craig
March 23, 2007
Page 2

In addition, the President's budget request eliminates two important programs to carry out proactive recovery efforts on private lands- the Landowner Incentive Program and the Private Stewardship Grants Programs. These programs provide resources to states and private landowners to conserve endangered plants and animals on non-federal lands. In 2006, funding was awarded to efforts in 46 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The need for these programs far outstrips available funding – the amount requested for worthy projects on average totals two to three times the yearly available funding. These programs should be restored through the appropriations process.


While we understand the existing budget constraints placed on the Subcommittee, we urge you make every effort to provide a total increase of at least \$38.7 million over the President's request for USFWS endangered species operating accounts, with the increases allocated as follows: \$6.9 million for Listing, \$16.7 million for Recovery, \$11.6 million for Consultation, and \$3.4 million for Candidate Conservation. We further ask for increases of \$16.2 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund and that the Landowner Incentive Program and Private Stewardship Grants Program be restored and funded at \$27.4 million and \$11 million respectively. However, while these voluntary incentives programs are important for the recovery of our nation's imperiled species, they should not be funded at the expense of the Fish and Wildlife Service's core endangered species programs.

Furthermore, we anticipate the passage of S. 700, the Endangered Species Recovery Act. This broadly supported bipartisan bill would offer \$2 billion dollars in tax credits to private landowners, but the Fish and Wildlife Service will require additional funding to enroll landowners and offer technical assistance. We respectfully request that the Subcommittee allocate \$5 million so that the Fish and Wildlife Service can implement this important new legislation.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,









Blanche L. Lincoln

Susan M. Collins

John Thorne

Ken Salazar

Jack Reed

Tom Harkin

Barbara

Maria Cantwell

Bob Duff

Debbie Stenehew

Dick Durbin

Norm Feyrer

Robert A. Mikulski

Robert Menendez

Hillary Rodham Clinton

W. V. Roth

Chris Dodd

Edward M. Kennedy

Tom F. Kelly

105 / Rubin

Chuck Schumer

Carl Levin

Olympic Jimmy

Ben Cardin
