



October 9, 2018

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment
and Public Works
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thomas Carper
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment
and Public Works
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the National Wildlife Federation and our six million members and supporters, please accept these comments for the record on the October 10, 2018 Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works hearing, "From Yellowstone's Grizzly Bear to the Chesapeake's Delmarva Fox Squirrel — Successful State Conservation, Recovery, and Management of Wildlife."

Your hearing comes at a pivotal moment for our nation and our wildlife heritage. Simply put, America's wildlife is in crisis — with more than one-third of all species at-risk or vulnerable to potential extinction in the decades ahead. From sage grouse in the West to burying beetle in the east, species of every shape and size are facing unprecedented challenges.

Amid these challenges to our iconic wildlife, however, we have seen incredible stories of recovery of endangered and threatened species. The Endangered Species Act has been very successful in staving off extinction so far, with approximately 99% of all listed species still being in existence today, and species such as the bald eagle, American alligator and others have recovered. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service have worked in partnership with state wildlife agencies, private citizens, nonprofits like the National Wildlife Federation, and other federal agencies to recover federally endangered and threatened species. Through these partnerships and collaborations, and funding, we've recovered species like Yellowstone's Grizzly Bear and the Chesapeake's Delmarva Fox Squirrel, and many others.

These successful species conservation efforts highlight the need for more state-federal partnership, investment of resources and dedicated funding, and proactive, collaborative, on-the-ground wildlife conservation efforts.

The greatest barrier to wildlife conservation in our nation is the chronic underinvestment in proactive, on-the-ground collaborative conservation efforts for species of greatest conservation need, before these species require emergency room measures, as prescribed by the ESA. Like Ben Franklin's old adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of

cure,” we have failed to invest early in voluntary, non-regulatory measures before species reach a crisis point—and that failure has too often turned what could have been “collaborative conservation” into “combat conservation” where potential partners are pitted against each other through regulatory processes and often litigation.

The National Wildlife Federation has been deeply involved in both the recovery of the grizzly bear and the Delmarva fox squirrel. In the case of the grizzlies, the National Wildlife Federation has worked for decades with ranchers grazing on public lands to eliminate livestock/grizzly conflicts in areas of high bear activity. We also worked with partners like the Greater Yellowstone Coalition which leads efforts to bear-proof public campgrounds all around Yellowstone National Park; rancher associations like the Madison Valley Ranch Lands Group and the Centennial Valley Association which have hired range riders to monitor and protect the livestock herds of their members; and Defenders of Wildlife which works to help local communities reduce conflicts. Similarly, as Delaware’s Secretary of Natural Resources and Environmental Control I had the privilege of working on collaborative efforts by state and federal officials in Delaware and Maryland, partnering with private forest landowners, the forest products industry, and NGOs, like Delaware Wildlands, the Nature Conservancy, and the National Wildlife Federation’s Delaware Affiliate, the Delaware Nature Society—all of whom helped restore critical fox squirrel habitat across the Delmarva Peninsula. Both of these successes are wonderful examples of public and private entities bringing together significant resources and capacity to achieve tangible conservation outcomes through truly collaborative partnerships.

A bipartisan agreement in the Senate on providing significant dedicated funding for wildlife conservation through the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act or a similar piece of legislation would provide a much needed shot in the arm for the wildlife recovery efforts discussed in this hearing, and complement the movement in the House to fund them. The House Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (H.R. 4647) currently has more than 100 bipartisan co-sponsors split evenly between the parties. The bill would direct \$1.3 billion of dedicated resources annually (with a 25% local match requirement) to State and Territorial Wildlife Agencies for the implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs). These SWAPs are developed collaboratively with all local stakeholders to identify species of greatest conservation needs and plans to increase their populations.

Providing dedicated funding would ensure state agencies they have the resources for fully engaging in proactive collaborative conservation of the full diversity of species within their state, across multiple states, and with the Services. This action would be entirely consistent with the recommendations of the Western Governors Association, the National Governors Association, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America’s Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources, upon which we served under the leadership of Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris and former Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal.

We urge this Committee to replicate the same level of bipartisan cooperation displayed during recent negotiations over America’s Water Infrastructure Act and the fire funding fix for the U.S. Forest Service by investing in proactive, collaborative conservation solutions through the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act, and to support the recovery of federally endangered and threatened species through increased appropriations for federal agencies to implement the ESA.

Addressing America's wildlife crisis will require a solution on par with the sheer scale of the challenge we face. The status quo is the managed decline of our wildlife heritage. The bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act offers an alternative way forward where Yellowstone's Grizzly Bear and the Chesapeake's Delmarva Fox Squirrel are examples other states can follow.

We look forward to working with the Committee to increase funding for state wildlife agencies, increase funding for the recovery of federally listed species, and end the wildlife crisis.

Sincerely,

Collin O'Mara
President and CEO
National Wildlife Federation