

April 08, 2025

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol H-307
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: FY2026 Funding Request for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service & Endangered Species Conservation

Dear Chair Collins, Vice Chair Murray, Chair Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro,

Since January, President Trump and Elon Musk have taken a wrecking ball to the federal workforce, ignoring the directives of Congress on appropriated funding across the government and systemically dismantling the integrity of the Executive Branch. In less than three months, Musk and his so-called “Department of Government Efficiency” have unlawfully and indiscriminately fired tens of thousands of employees from more than a dozen agencies, including at least 420 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees—or 4% of the agency’s entire workforce. Most of those fired were field biologists working on the ground to protect and recover some of our most imperiled animals and plants and the wild places they live.

The dangerous effects of these mass firings are starting to come into focus. From manatees in Florida to black-footed ferrets in the Great Plains to northern spotted owls in the Pacific Northwest, endangered species across the country are being pushed closer to extinction because of these staffing cuts. The Crystal National Wildlife Refuge — the only dedicated refuge protecting Florida manatees — lost two of its 8 full-time staff members. The loss of five staff members at the Hakalau National Wildlife Refuge on Hawai’i have jeopardized critical work to cultivate endangered native plants and remove invasive species for the benefit of critically endangered honeycreepers. Northern spotted owl surveys critical to ensuring the species doesn’t go extinct will not occur this year, which could impact timber sales and other forest projects that rely on monitoring of the bird. In fact, the loss of hundreds of dedicated employees will make it almost impossible for the Service to effectively carry out its most basic duties, including completing timely project evaluations as part of its consultation mandate.

These massive reductions in agency resources only compound the existing struggles that have plagued the Service for decades, including the systemic lack of funding to properly implement the Endangered Species Act. The Service currently only receives around one-third of the funding it needs to carry out the mission Congress intended 50 years ago when it dedicated our country to protecting the species and the habitats that need it most. As a result, hundreds of endangered species receive less than \$1,000 a year for their recovery, with many receiving no funding from the Service at all. To make matters worse, the

recent passage of the Continuing Resolution has now dug the agency into an even deeper funding hole. Because of these shortfalls, nearly 50 imperiled species have tragically gone extinct while waiting for the Act's protections.

While we recognize that significant funding increases are unlikely in the short term, we must also recognize that the biological needs of our most imperiled animals and plants do not simply change based on which way the political wind blows. To truly save species, Congress must fully fund the Endangered Species Act. This means providing at least \$857 million annually for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Ecological Services Program and Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund. However, given the political reality we face, Congress should, at the very least, maintain existing funding for the Service while doing everything it can to ensure protections are put in place for the hundreds of Service employees who were unjustly fired.

Now more than ever, we need our Congressional leaders to stand up against these unprecedented attacks to our federal agencies and the laws they implement. The Endangered Species Act has saved countless imperiled species from extinction and has put hundreds more on the road to recovery. Thanks to the Act, millions of acres of forests, mountains, rivers, deserts, beaches, and oceans are protected. Simply put, the Endangered Species Act is our most powerful tool to combat the extinction crisis and stem the loss of biodiversity currently facing our country and the global community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
Defenders of Wildlife
Alameda Creek Alliance
Animal Welfare Institute
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.
Beyond Pesticides
Bird conservation network
Black Warrior Riverkeeper
Bold Visions Conservation
Christian Council of Delmarva
Climate Communications Coalition
Conservation Congress
Delaware-Otsego Audubon Soc. (NY)
Desert Tortoise Council
Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Species Coalition
Evergreen Audubon Society
Friends of Merrymeeting Bay
Friends of the Bitterroot
Friends of the Earth

Friends of the Eel River
Gallatin Wildlife Association
Glynn Environmental Coalition
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Humboldt Waterkeeper
inNative
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Intheshadowofthewolf
Kettle Range Conservation Group
Kodiak Audubon Society
La Purisima Audubon Society
Large Carnivore Fund
Lehigh Valley Audubon Society
Lobos of the Southwest
Long Beach Alliance for Clean Energy
Los Angeles Audubon Society
Los Padres ForestWatch
Maine Audubon
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
National Wolfwatcher Coalition
NC WARN
Nevada Wildlife Alliance
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems
Oasis Earth
Ocean Conservation Research
Oceana
Oregon Wild
Potomac Valley Audubon Society
Predator Defense
Project Coyote
Protect Our Woods
Raptors Are The Solution
Rouse House Organics
San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society
SAVE THE FROGS!
Save the Manatee Club
Silvix Resources
Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, Missouri
Sky Island Alliance
Social Compassion in Legislation
Southern Environmental Law Center
Species Unite
Swan View Coalition, Inc.
The International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council
The Safina Center
The Urban Wildlands Group
Turtle Island Restoration Network

Vermont Center for Ecostudies
Wasatch Clean Air Coalition
Washington Wild
Waterkeeper Alliance
Watershed Alliance of Marin
Western Watersheds Project
Wild Virginia
WildEarth Guardians
Wildlife Science Center
Wolf and Wildlife Advocates
Wolf Conservation Center
Wyoming Untrapped