



The voice of fish and wildlife agencies

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December 5, 2019

Honorable Raul Grijalva, Chairman  
House Natural Resources Committee  
1511 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Rob Bishop, Ranking Member  
House Natural Resources Committee  
123 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Bishop:

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association) writes to encourage your continued strong bipartisan support for H.R. 3742, the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act*, and for H.R. 877, *Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act*. Since 1902, the Association's mission has been to represent the collective interests of the state fish and wildlife agencies (states) before Congress and the federal administration. We write in support of these important pieces of legislation and strongly encourage you to support and shepherd them through the legislative process in the House of Representatives. We would like to thank Representatives Dingell and Fortenberry for introducing H.R. 3742, and Representatives Scott and Veasey for introducing H.R. 877. These are two of the Association's legislative priorities this Congress.

### ***Recovering America's Wildlife Act, H.R. 3742***

The Association has a long history of supporting the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* and strongly believes now is the time for this legislation. With over 12,000 species of greatest conservation need (SGCNs) identified by the states in their science-based State Wildlife Action Plans and a loss of three billion birds since 1970, we must take swift action to prevent more species from becoming endangered. H.R. 3742 provides the resources and solutions commensurate with today's wildlife conservation challenges that are necessary to prevent these at-risk species from becoming endangered and to help recover species already listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Our greatest chance for success is through the implementation of proactive, voluntary and incentive-based conservation actions that are state-led with the support and participation of local communities, private landowners, businesses, and conservation partners. Conserving imperiled species before they need the protections of the ESA is prudent, more biologically efficient, and less expensive to taxpayers in the long-term. The *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* would provide necessary funding to implement these congressionally mandated plans, conserving wildlife populations before they become more costly and controversial to recover.

### ***Implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans Prevent Wildlife from Becoming Endangered***

In 2005, the 56 state, territorial and District of Columbia fish and wildlife agencies completed [State Wildlife Action Plans](#). These plans were mandated by Congress, approved by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and their completion was an important milestone, marking the first time for nationwide comprehensive strategies to conserve all fish and wildlife. The plans guide and prioritize conservation work and their full implementation will help sustain the nation's fish and wildlife for future generations.

The plans were updated in 2015 with the newest science and conservation tools to address changing environmental conditions and typically are updated every five years, but no less than every 10 years.

State Wildlife Action Plans were developed using [eight required elements](#) to ensure consistency among the plans and scientific integrity. Each state conducted an assessment to identify the SGCNs in their jurisdiction including federal and state threatened and endangered species, rare and declining species, and species that may be declining but lack status information. Nationally, over [12,000 Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#) were identified. Although the plans are important to the recovery of species that are already endangered, a primary purpose of State Wildlife Action Plans is to *prevent new endangered species*.

State Wildlife Action Plans identify the key habitats and plant community types critical to the survival of SGCNs, the significant threats to their sustainability, and needed conservation actions to improve their status. Restoration of key habitats often requires restoration of specific plant species that comprise habitat types needed to restore certain wildlife species. Through these efforts, habitat quality is improving, and some federally listed plant species are being restored and recovered. The plans also outline how species will be monitored and the manner in which effectiveness of conservation actions will be measured. States are required to coordinate development of their plan with federal, state, local and tribal agencies and to include the public in the design and/or review of their plan.

State Wildlife Action Plans draw on the expertise of leading scientists and are built upon decades of conservation experience by incorporating elements of existing species and habitat plans. The heart of State Wildlife Action Plans are the voluntary, proactive and incentive-based conservation actions designed to address threats such as invasive species, disease, habitat loss and fragmentation, and disruption of ecosystem processes. Implementation of the plans relies on existing and new partnerships between agencies, conservation groups, businesses, the public, and private landowners.

The need to fund State Wildlife Action Plans through H.R. 3742 is urgent. It is estimated that one-third of fish and wildlife species in the United States are at risk of becoming threatened or endangered. We can wait for wildlife to decline and react to problems with expensive, last-ditch recovery efforts, or we can take proactive actions now before wildlife recovery becomes more costly and controversial.

All combined federal agencies currently spend about \$1.5 billion on the existing 700 federally endangered and threatened wildlife species, and this amount is rising annually. We are proposing to spend \$1.4 billion per year to proactively prevent the need to list more species and to help recover over 12,000 SGCNs identified by states before they, too, need the protections of the ESA. This is a sound investment in preventing species from becoming further threatened and/or endangered and ensures our nation's rich diversity of fish and wildlife persist to benefit future generations.

#### *States' Accountability Will Continue*

The same five levels of accountability and standards currently used for the State Wildlife Grants program, which is arguably the most accountable federal conservation grant program in existence, would apply to state projects and programs funded under H.R. 3742. The levels of accountability are:

- **First Level** -- States are required by current law to involve other federal agencies, private conservation groups, and the public in the development of a State's Wildlife Action Plan. The plans are typically approved by a state/territorial fish and wildlife agency's governing body in a public setting.

- **Second Level** -- States would be required to implement actions identified in State Wildlife Action Plans. These plans are approved by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and require updating at least once every decade but more commonly are revised every five years. Any significant revision to the plans must also be approved by the FWS. These plans are publicly available on the state fish and wildlife agencies' websites.
- **Third Level** -- All grants would be administered through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. All funding would be distributed to the states and territories as grants administered by the USFWS. The states are required to comply with federal regulations and submit grant applications that clearly state objectives of a project and intended outcomes as it relates to implementation of the State Wildlife Action Plan. States are required to submit regular reports on how spending is being conducted and on project progress and performance.
- **Fourth Level** -- There is an effectiveness measures framework that is being incorporated into the USFWS grant reporting and tracking system to ensure that activities funded through grants to the states to implement actions in State Wildlife Action Plans meet intended outcomes. The system will be able to produce reports that roll-up activities to show accountability of projects at state, regional or national scales.
- **Fifth Level** -- Each state/territory is required to undergo an Interior Office of Inspector General audit every 3-5 years to ensure compliance to all regulations and procedures administered by the USFWS. All projects funded also would be subject to these OIG audits. These audits are posted to the OIG's website and available to the public.

For over 80 years, state-led conservation efforts have proven to be incredibly effective at restoring species. From the brink of extinction, the states have restored fish and wildlife species like the iconic American bald eagle and peregrine falcon to white-tailed deer, waterfowl, and striped-bass. The implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans is building upon these unparalleled, state-led conservation successes. For example, in recent years the states have assisted in the recovery and delisting of species such as the Oregon chub, Kirkland's warbler, Delmarva fox squirrel, and Louisiana black bear. They assisted in the downlisting of the American crocodile, snail darter, wood stork, and the West Indian manatee, and they precluded the need to list many others including the New England Cottontail. These conservation success stories were the result of dedicated partnerships and consistent effort over time. Much more can be done with the consistent and dedicated funding provided through the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act*.

Today's historic species declines are threatening Americans' quality of life and our national economy, and it creates regulatory uncertainty for businesses and industries, which further impacts jobs and the health of our communities. The American outdoor recreation economy generates \$887 billion annually, and of that, wildlife-associated recreation accounts for \$140 billion. Private sector businesses in this country support wildlife conservation because healthy wildlife populations drive business and create economic opportunity, especially in rural communities. Communities that recognize the value of outdoor recreation and a healthy lifestyle are more desirable for businesses and better for employee retention. Protecting these economic benefits are wise, responsible, and are in the best interest of our citizens.

Additionally, at-risk species conservation and recreation are not mutually exclusive. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources worked in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Army at Fort Benning to secure the new [Fall Line Wildlife Management Area](#), which is being conserved and restored for red-cockaded woodpecker, gopher tortoise, and other imperiled species. The partnership, wildlife management area, and management activities will provide the public with new outdoor recreational opportunities like bird-watching, camping, fishing, hiking, and hunting. At the same

time, it affords the U. S. Army with improved opportunities for training and benefits readiness. This success story can be replicated in many landscapes across the country through enactment of H.R. 3742.

The *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* enjoys broad bipartisan support from a wide range of interests including states, conservation organizations, businesses, and industries. Passage of this bill is vital to our nation's natural resources and our outdoor heritage. This bill is in the best interest of our nation's diverse fish and wildlife, our citizens, the economy, the American taxpayer, and future generations. We urge you to advance the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* through the legislative process and support its passage.

***Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act, H.R. 877***

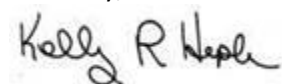
This bill also has bipartisan support and is supported by all the states, numerous sporting-conservation organizations, and trade associations. Without a federal mandate or any increase in user fees or taxes, the bill preserves the current "user pays-public benefits" American model of wildlife conservation funding for future generations by giving states the flexibility needed in today's electronic information era to more effectively communicate with and educate hunters and the public about important wildlife conservation activities, outdoor recreation opportunities, and programs designed to meet the needs of today's citizens while continuing traditional and critical wildlife and habitat conservation efforts. Unfortunately, this system of conservation funding is in jeopardy.

In 1978, 16.2 million of the nation's 222 million citizens purchased a hunting license, representing 7% of the U.S. population. Now, there are over 328 million people in the United States, 13.3 million of which are certified hunting license holders, or less than 4% of the nation's population. Our nation's population dynamics are changing, and while many citizens desire to locally source their own protein, reconnect with their roots, and carry-on or start new traditions of hunting with family and friends many don't know where to go or how to start. States are prohibited from marketing, outreach, and communication to the public because "public relations" currently are prohibited by the 1937 law, making it difficult to connect with today's citizens. This steady decline in participation over the past four decades threatens America's hunting heritage and represents a fundamental challenge to maintaining funding streams that are vital to state-based wildlife and habitat conservation. However, H.R. 877 helps address these modern-day challenges.

The Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Safety Trust Fund already allows states to use some of their apportioned funds for recruitment, education, marketing, and outreach for fishing and boating programs and to help inform the general public. H.R. 877 would provide the same flexibility for similar activities under the Pittman-Robertson Fund that states are deploying today the benefit of anglers, boaters, and the general public.

Again, we ask for your support and passage of H.R. 877 and H.R. 3742. These important pieces of legislation are both necessary to secure the future of America's wildlife and our nation's outdoor and hunting heritage. Thank you for your commitment to conservation, and we look forward to working with you to enact these bills.

Sincerely,



Kelly R. Hepler  
President