

September 4, 2019

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate

The Honorable Tom Carper
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate

Dear Chairman Murkowski, Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Manchin, Ranking Member Carper, and Members of the Committees on Energy and Natural Resources and Environment and Public Works:

As organizations representing millions of Americans, who hunt, fish, hike, camp, paddle, and enjoy the outdoors, we greatly appreciate the leadership that each of you provide in advancing key conservation priorities. We are especially grateful for the bipartisan passage of the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (S.47).

We write to encourage your continued strong, bipartisan support for addressing our nation's most urgent conservation needs: recovering imperiled wildlife species, repairing our crumbling public lands infrastructure, and expanding outdoor recreational opportunities. Five bipartisan bills—the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, the Restore Our Parks (and Public Lands) Act, the Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act, the North American Wetlands Conservation Extension Act, and the Modernizing the Pittman Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act—will proactively address these challenges, while bolstering our nation's \$887 billion outdoor economy, which employs more than 7.6 million Americans. These five programs are fully complimentary—restoring wildlife habitat, fixing recreational infrastructure, and expanding access to America's outdoor heritage—and together provide the foundation for conservation across America:

- 1. Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 3742):** Right now, more than one-third of American wildlife species are at-risk and in need of proactive conservation action. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act would accelerate the recovery of more than 12,000 "Species of Greatest Conservation Need," as identified through existing Congressionally-mandated State Wildlife Action Plans, including species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. This legislation provides matching funds to states, territories, and tribes to enact collaborative, proactive, on-the-ground habitat restoration efforts to restore wildlife populations and prevent species from requiring protections under ESA. This collaborative, non-regulatory approach has attracted broad bipartisan support and support from a range of industries, because it will help save the full diversity of America's fish and wildlife resources, while reducing regulatory uncertainty.
- 2. Restore Our Parks (and Public Lands) Act (S.500, H.R. 1225):** Maintaining roads, trails, campsites, parking lots, boat ramps, and other public lands infrastructure makes possible the millions of visits to hunt, fish, scout, hike, climb, and enjoy them. Since much recreation and most hunting and fishing occurs on non-Parks land, we recommend that the legislation also direct a small portion of the funding to maintain infrastructure at National Forests (10% of funds), National Wildlife Refuges (10%), and Bureau of Land Management lands (5%). These multiple use and wildlife-focused lands host more than 261 million visitors annually, in addition to the 331 million visitors to National Park sites. The maintenance backlog on all of our public lands should be addressed simultaneously and equitably.

- 3. Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act (S. 1081; H.R. 3195):** LWCF has helped conserve some of the most important lands in our nation for hunting, fishing, and recreating. We greatly appreciate your collective leadership in securing permanent authorization for the program earlier this year and incorporating the Making Public Lands Public provision, which requires that at least 3% of the funds be used to expand opportunities for hunting, fishing, and other sporting activities. We believe that the federal agencies should prioritize strategic easements and acquisitions, such as access parcels that help unlock the more than 9 million acres of currently inaccessible public lands; inholdings and parcels adjacent to existing units that will improve landscape management and reduce operating costs; and parcels that will help improve the resilience of natural systems and reduce damage to local communities, such as forests parcels near the wildlands-urban interface that would help mitigate catastrophic megafires, wetlands or inland riparian corridors that reduce flood risks, and headwaters that provide water storage capacity and mitigate drought conditions. Permanent, dedicated funding for LWCF will ensure that communities across the country can predictably leverage resources to grow their local outdoor economy by expanding hunting, fishing, and other recreational opportunities and conserving important wildlife habitat.
- 4. North American Wetlands Conservation Extension Act (S.261, H.R. 925):** For the past thirty years, NAWCA has produced economic and environmental benefits, while conserving wetlands that support America's fish and wildlife resources. More than 5,600 conservation partners from small landowners to large corporations have teamed up on 2,644 NAWCA projects to positively affect over 33.4 million acres of habitat. Through the history of the program, NAWCA projects have been implemented in all 50 states. In addition to protecting wildlife habitat, this program improves water quality and generates local revenue by increasing tourism through enhanced outdoor recreation opportunities. This program also creates on average, nearly 7,500 new jobs annually, generating more than \$200 million in worker earnings each year.
- 5. Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act (S.2092, H.R. 877):** The Pittman-Robertson Fund is a vital funding source for the conservation of wild birds and mammals, but it lacks a mechanism to sustain and grow the number of sportsmen and sportswomen who fund it through the payment of user excise taxes. This bipartisan bill will authorize the use of a portion of the funding for Basic Hunter Education and Safety under Pittman-Robertson (P-R) for state fish and wildlife agencies to recruit, retain and reactivate hunters and recreational shooters. This bill provides parity between P-R and Dingell-Johnson programs and would enable state fish and wildlife agencies the flexibility to communicate with sportsmen and sportswomen more effectively, an approach which has demonstrated proven results in increasing participation in angling and boating efforts.

We strongly encourage Congress to prioritize enactment of these critical conservation programs and fully fund them with dedicated revenues. By enacting these interrelated pieces of legislation, we can grow America's outdoor economy and ensure America's public lands and wildlife heritage endure for the enjoyment and benefit of current and future generations.

Thank you for your commitment to conservation.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
California Waterfowl

Camp Fire Club of America
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Ducks Unlimited
Houston Safari Club
Izaak Walton League of America
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Wildlife Federation
North American Falconers Association
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion – The Hunter's Institute
Pheasants Forever, Inc.
Pope and Young Club
Quail Forever
Quality Deer Management Association
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Sportsmen's Alliance
Texas Wildlife Association
The Conservation Fund
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute