

Colorado General Assembly
Joint Budget Committee
200 E Colfax
Denver, CO 80202

March 1, 2022

Dear Members of the Colorado Joint Budget Committee and House and Senate Leadership,

We, the undersigned organizations write to express our support for the Colorado Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) budget request for FY 2022-23 and supplemental budget requests for FY 2021-22 listed below. Additionally, we ask that you continue to seek and support funding for wildlife crossings to make the state safer for both humans and wildlife.

Our organizations collectively represent tens of thousands of Colorado hunters, anglers, conservationists, and outdoor enthusiasts who share a deep connection to Colorado's wild landscapes and wildlife. As noted in the Governor's January 3rd letter to the Joint Budget Committee "hunting, fishing, and watchable wildlife contribute \$5 billion in economic output in Colorado each year and support 40,000 jobs across the state." Fish and wildlife-based recreation also benefits individuals' health and is an important part of our outdoor culture. Our members recognize the urgent need to protect and sustain Colorado's wildlife so that future generations can enjoy quality hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing opportunities. As such, we respectfully ask that you support and prioritize the budget requests listed below:

R1: Increased Outdoor Recreation and Conservation: \$5.9M and 15.5 FTE

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) staff work diligently to assist and interface with the public, resolve human-wildlife conflicts, and simultaneously protect our prized public land, recreation, and wildlife resources. As Colorado's population continues to grow, and outdoor recreationists continue to flock to our public lands at record-high rates, it is increasingly important that our fish and wildlife agency is adequately funded and staffed to address the demand and the inescapable resource management challenges.

The Future Generations Act was passed in 2018 to provide the funding needed to improve wildlife populations, increase the number of fish stocked, maintain and improve parks and wildlife areas, and recruit and maintain qualified employees, among other goals. Considering the state is made up of over 66 million acres of land, has nearly 5.8 million residents, and supports over 1 million hunters and anglers every year, adding 15.5 full time employees to increase and manage outdoor recreation and conservation is justified and reasonable. Additionally, allocating \$5.9 million to support operating budgets for state parks and wildlife operations, temporary hourly staff, and the COTREX trails app, among other things, will enhance staff capacity, improve user experiences, and ultimately benefit residents, fish, wildlife, and ecosystems.

R3: Outdoor Regional Partnerships: \$861,506 and 1.0 FTE

The Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnerships Initiative seeks to ensure that Colorado's land, water, and wildlife thrive alongside major growth in the popularity of outdoor recreation and

tourism, and the associated expansion of trail networks that can impact fish and wildlife and their habitats. Additional funding for this initiative is critical as interest in forming and developing regional coalitions grows, and as these coalitions require further guidance and support. Adding one full time employee to support the initiative is important to ensuring the program succeeds and coalitions produce well-informed, actionable, equitable plans by 2023 that avoid further fragmentation and degradation of important fish and wildlife habitat.

R6: Assistant Director for Energy Innovation: \$128,526 and 1.0 FTE

The need to dedicate additional staffing to address careful development planning for the deployment of additional traditional and renewable energy resources has been a growing issue at the DNR for years. Developing a thoughtful and intentional plan for the State to diversify its revenue streams and transition away from a predominant reliance on oil and gas revenues is necessary to meet the ongoing financial needs of all Coloradans while achieving the state's renewable energy portfolio standards. The pace and extent of renewable energy development likely to occur in Colorado over the next decade is unprecedented, and if implemented poorly, there will be unintended adverse consequences. We are already seeing improperly sited renewable energy projects in Colorado impacting sensitive fish and wildlife habitats, including big game migration corridors, due to poor planning and oversight. There is a need to develop a streamlined process for regulating and siting renewable energy development projects that fully evaluates potential impacts to natural resources and implements the mitigation hierarchy to avoid, minimize, and mitigate unavoidable adverse impacts.

R9: Wildlife Council Spending Authority: \$800,000

The hunting, angling, and conservation communities are proud of our collective contributions to fish and wildlife species' recoveries, habitat restoration, and minimizing risks to wildlife, and we support the DNR's efforts to share conservation stories with more Coloradans. As such, we support the \$800,000 request for spending authority to help the Colorado Wildlife Council connect with more Coloradans through professionally designed, targeted, media-based education and outreach.

BA-01: Staff Capacity to Increase Tribal Engagement: \$144,963 and 1.0 FTE, plus 0.5 FTE apprenticeship position

The state of Colorado encompasses the historic homeland and range of many Native American people including those from the Apache, Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute nations, and the Comanche, Kiowa, Navajo, Pueblo, and Shoshone tribes. Natural resource management decisions have the potential to impact areas that are historically and culturally significant to one or more of these tribes, so adding dedicated staff for tribal engagement will allow the DNR to be a better partner to sovereign tribes and their people. We believe proactive and regular communication between the DNR and tribal governments will result in better resource

management decisions in Colorado.

BA-02: Implementing Big Game Policy Report Recommendations: \$1.15M and 8.0 FTE

In 2021 the DNR produced a report outlining [Opportunities to Improve Sensitive Habitat and Movement Route Connectivity for Colorado's Big Game Species](#). With those recommendations in place, the next steps are for DNR to develop a Statewide Habitat Conservation and Connectivity Plan and meaningful proposals through the Colorado Wildlife Transportation Alliance. The \$1,153,804 and 8.0 FTE requested for FY 2022-23 will help ensure that Colorado remains a leader in big game management and conservation, and positions Colorado to successfully compete for and leverage available federal funds for infrastructure projects (see section below about additional funding for wildlife crossings). These allocations from the Wildlife Cash Fund will help make travel through the state safer for all, and will ensure that healthy, resilient wildlife populations continue to be part of the Colorado way of life.

S-01, BA-03: Staff and Operating for State Park at Sweetwater Lake: \$93,209 and 0.3 FTE for FY 2021-22 and \$426,921 and 3.0 FTE for FY 2022-23

To get the newest state park successfully up and running, additional staff and funding support are needed. As DNR and CPW continue to develop plans for carefully managing fish, wildlife, recreation, and sensitive habitat and resources in this area, it's critical that they have adequate resources to survey and understand the area's fish, wildlife, and natural amenities, and to explore and address the challenges that will arise. The unique, natural high mountain lake for which the park is named will provide the public with fishing and boating opportunities, and we encourage CPW and its Sweetwater Lake State Park partners to ensure that hunting access is a top priority as well.

Please also seek and support additional funding for wildlife crossings

In November 2021, the President signed into law the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*. The Act includes the creation of a new pilot program directing \$350 million over five years for wildlife crossing infrastructure that will reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and support wildlife connectivity. The funding will be awarded to states through a competitive grant program. Colorado has been on the forefront of wildlife crossing planning and construction nationally, thanks to the work of Colorado's Department of Transportation (CDOT), DNR, CPW, and NGO partners through [the Colorado Wildlife and Transportation Alliance](#). Products like the [Western Slope Wildlife Prioritization Study](#) and the forthcoming Eastern Slope and Plains Wildlife Prioritization Study help position Colorado to effectively compete for these new federal funds.

Significant funding is required to implement the priorities identified in these studies, which would protect people and wildlife across the state. While new federal funding is welcome, it is not guaranteed that Colorado will receive funds. One of the main evaluation criteria for the new federal grant program is the amount of non-federal match each project can provide. Therefore,

the more state funding a project can demonstrate, the more competitive the grant proposal will be.

The undersigned organizations support the creation of a wildlife safe passages mitigation fund at CDOT as well to fund crossing infrastructure in Colorado. We also support sustainable annual funding for the Colorado Wildlife Transportation Alliance from the DNR and CDOT budgets, and the addition of a statewide wildlife movement coordinator at CDOT to mirror the position that was created at CPW in 2021.

In summary, we urge you to support the requests outlined above for the FY 2022-23 budget and supplemental FY 2021-22 budget, and seek and support additional funding for wildlife crossings. We view these investments as necessary to conserving and maintaining Colorado's natural resources, including robust fish and wildlife populations, and the fish and wildlife-related outdoor recreation opportunities they provide.

Thank you very much for considering our top budget priorities as you work to prepare budget recommendations for the General Assembly.

Sincerely,



CC: Colorado Senate President Steve Fenberg
Colorado Senate Majority Leader Dominick Moreno
Colorado Speaker of the House Alec Garnett
Colorado House Majority Leader Daneya Esgar