African Wild Dog Conservancy * Alaska Wilderness League * American Bird Conservancy
American Rivers * Animal Welfare Institute * Avian Welfare Coalition
Back Country Horsemen of New Mexico * Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project
Born Free USA * California Wolf Center * Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity * Center for Food Safety * Clean Water Action
Conservation Northwest * Defenders of Wildlife * Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition * Environment America
Environmental Protection Information Center * Friends of the Wisconsin Wolf & Wildlife
Great Lakes Wildlife Alliance * Great Old Broads for Wilderness * Howling for Wolves
Humane Society Legislative Fund * Humane Society of the United States
Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association * International Fund for Animal Welfare
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute * Klamath Forest Alliance
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center * League of Conservation Voters
National Parks Conservation Association * National Wolfwatcher Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council * New Mexico Sportsmen
Northcoast Environmental Center * Northeast Oregon Ecosystems * Oceana
Predator Defense * Quality Parks * RESTORE: The North Woods * Sierra Club
Southwest Environmental Center * Trapfree Wisconsin * The Fund for Animals
Turtle Island Restoration Network * Western Environmental Law Center
Western Nebraska Resources Council * Western Watersheds Project * WildEarth Guardians
Wildlands Network * WildWest Institute * Wolf Conservation Center * Wolf Haven International * Wyoming Untrapped

April 6, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations
2306 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations
2365 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Frelinghuysen and Ranking Members Leahy and Lowey:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters nationwide, we are writing to urge you to reject all policy riders on Fiscal Year 17 appropriations legislation that would erode the protections of the Endangered Species Act and other safeguards for wildlife, and ensure that conservation actions undertaken by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service are adequately funded. Damaging provisions that undermine the Endangered Species Act were included in both the House and Senate versions of the FY 17 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

appropriations bills from last year (H.R. 5538/S. 3068). If enacted, any one of these riders would be highly detrimental to the future of imperiled species conservation. We also strongly oppose all other anti-environmental riders that would undermine protections for our land, wildlife, water, and air. Additionally, we urge you to maintain funding for conservation programs under the Endangered Species Act at no less than FY 16 levels.

The Endangered Species Act remains the most effective and important law to protect species at risk of extinction. This visionary law has served as a model for other conservation laws across the globe. Thanks to the Endangered Species Act, the United States has successfully conserved numerous iconic American species that make up our important natural heritage. 99 percent of the species placed under the Endangered Species Act's protections are still with us today, including the bald eagle, the whooping crane, and the Southern sea otter. It is also a wildly popular conservation law. According to a June 2015 poll, 90 percent of American voters support the Endangered Species Act.[1] Another poll from December 2016 found that 81 percent of American voters agree that saving at-risk wildlife from going extinct is an important goal for the federal government.[2]

None of the Endangered Species Act riders that were included in the FY 17 Interior appropriations bills would advance the goal of saving at-risk wildlife from extinction. In fact, each one would stymie efforts to conserve and recover imperiled species. We are deeply concerned by no fewer than eleven provisions included in one or both bills that would undermine the ESA, including riders that would strip federal protections for iconic American wildlife including the gray wolf, the Mexican gray wolf, the lesser prairie-chicken, and two species of meadow jumping mice. Another rider would block implementation of landmark land management plans to conserve the greater sage-grouse after years of collaboration among local, state and federal partners. Yet another provision would override protections for salmon and other endangered fish in California's Bay-Delta estuary. Decisions about whether imperiled species still need important conservation measures provided under the Endangered Species Act should be based on the best available science, rather than political considerations that fall outside of the Act's framework. We urge you not to include these riders in the conferenced bill, and to allow the Endangered Species Act to do its work.

We are also concerned about the steady decline in congressional appropriations for conservation measures under the Endangered Species Act we've witnessed over the years. The agencies that implement the Endangered Species Act desperately need more funding to develop species recovery plans and implement species recovery actions. Over 400 U.S. listed species do not currently have recovery plans. Additionally, inadequate funding for the ESA permitting program has resulted in delays for American businesses and landowners seeking to carry out activities ranging from road construction to bridge repairs to housing development and other land use activity. Funding for both permitting and recovery has failed to keep pace with newly listed species. The agencies also need adequate funding to evaluate whether declining species should be listed and to take steps – in partnership with states and other stakeholders – to conserve them while they await decisions.

As you finish the important work to fund the federal government through the end of this fiscal year, we urge you to fully fund the federal agencies that implement important conservation and recovery

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[1] Tulchin Research, *Poll Finds Overwhelming, Broad-Based Support for the Endangered Species Act Among Voters Nationwide,* July 2015, http://www.defenders.org/publications/Defenders-of-Wildlife-National-ESA-Survey.pdf

[2] Hart Research, *CAP Energy/Environment/Climate Voters Survey,* Dec. 2016, https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2017/01/18040011/FI-CAP-Energy-Enviro-Dec2016.pdf

actions under the Endangered Species Act, and to exclude the detrimental policy riders discussed above.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

African Wild Dog Conservancy
Alaska Wilderness League
American Bird Conservancy
American Rivers
Animal Welfare Institute
Avian Welfare Coalition
Back Country Horsemen of New Mexico
Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project
Born Free USA
California Wolf Center
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Food Safety
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National Parks Conservation Association
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New Mexico Sportsmen
Northcoast Environmental Center
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems
Oceana
Predator Defense
Quality Parks
RESTORE: The North Woods
Sierra Club
Southwest Environmental Center
Trapfree Wisconsin
The Fund for Animals
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Western Environmental Law Center
Western Nebraska Resources Council
Western Watersheds Project
WildEarth Guardians
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