



December 22, 2021

Thomas R. Carper
Chair, Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
410 Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Shelly Moore Capito
Ranking Member, Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
456 Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: S.2372, Recovering America's Wildlife Act

Chair Carper and Ranking Member Capito:

Thank you for holding a hearing on S.2372, Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA). On behalf of ConservAmerica, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting commonsense, market based and fiscally responsible solutions to today's environmental, conservation, and energy challenges, I write in support of this bipartisan bill. We urge the Committee to move forward with a mark-up.

Helping to reform, strengthen, and improve the protection and recovery of species ranks among ConservAmerica's highest priorities. RAWA fits squarely into that priority as it brings together both sides of the political spectrum to help the full diversity of fish and wildlife species. The legislation would amend the Wildlife Restoration Act to invest an additional \$1.3 billion per year for states and territories to implement their Wildlife Action Plans and \$97.5 million for tribal wildlife conservation efforts.

While the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has been an important tool to stop extinction, it has largely been ineffective in keeping species off the ESA list. Moreover, the costs for recovering species under the ESA have been significant. S.2372 gives states, territories, and tribes the resources they need to help restore and maintain species' health and prevent the need for federal protections under the ESA.

Recognizing the scarcity of taxpayer resources, the bill includes strong fiscal safeguards. First, it requires states and territories to match federal funding by 25 percent. Not only does this matching fund requirement demonstrate "skin in the game," it also brings additional capital

alongside federal resources to accelerate the species recovery. Moreover, S.2372 includes robust accountability mechanisms, including reporting, tracking and audit requirements subject to congressional, agency, Interior Office of Inspector General, and public review. Finally, the legislation is partially funded through resources generated from civil and criminal penalties, fines, or other revenues resulting from natural resource or environmental-related violations or enforcement actions that are not otherwise committed or appropriated. This provides an important revenue stream for the bill and makes a rational connection between violations of natural resource policy and our conservation objectives.

Although outside the scope of this legislation, we continue to support reforms to the ESA that would give a greater role to state resource agencies in providing input on listing, recovery goals, and habitat objectives. We also support the use of candidate conservation and safe harbor agreements to incentivize landowners and third parties to voluntarily enter into agreements to enhance habitat for protected species. With 71 percent of the American landscape under private ownership and 80 percent of endangered species inhabiting private lands, collaboration with private landowners is critical to achieving sustainable and cost-effective protections. Without such incentives, wildlife habitat can often become a liability rather than an asset.

What is clear is that species are best protected when the federal-state relationship is strong, and federal, state, local governments, and landowners work together to achieve a common goal. While Congress mandated that state fish and wildlife agencies develop State Wildlife Action Plans to protect wildlife, it has never fully funded their implementation. By providing stable and consistent funding, S.2372 would live up to the vision of the Wildlife Restoration Act by strengthening the federal-state partnership that is essential not only for species recovery but also for keeping species from being listing in the first place.

We applaud Senators Heinrich and Blunt and their respective staffs for their work on this bill and we urge the Committee to move forward with its consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T Johnston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and a long, sweeping underline.

Todd Johnston
Vice President