



January 18, 2022

Raúl Grijalva
Chair, Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resource
United States House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: H.R.2773, Recovering America's Wildlife Act

Chair Grijalva and Ranking Member Westerman:

Thank you for including H.R.2773, Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) in your January 19, 2022 business meeting. 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 to urge the Committee to approve this important, bipartisan bill.

Helping to reform, strengthen, and improve the protection and recovery of species ranks among ConservAmerica's highest priorities. RAWA brings together both sides of the political spectrum to help the full diversity of fish and wildlife species. As you know, 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 are significant. H.R.2773 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.

As conservatives, we do not take lightly measures that increase federal spending, add to the national deficit, or grow the size of government - and so we urge policymakers to offset new spending with reductions in other areas. We also encourage officials to seek ways to streamline federal regulations that are an obstacle to local decision makers' ability to respond to growing challenges or that dissuade greater private sector investment in species protection and recovery.

While we recognize that H.R.2773 exacerbates spending concerns, we believe that if the bill's overarching objectives are realized, it will help "buy-down" the cost of protecting species and lessen the cumulative taxpayer burden. The costs for recovering species under the ESA are significant, with the estimated average cost to the federal government around \$19 million per species and the highest cost at \$126 million for the Whooping Crane. To date, over 1,600 species are listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA and hundreds more are either proposed or waiting to be proposed for listing. In our view, investing in frontend measures that maintain wildlife health and reduce the need for costly, backend federal intervention is a responsible use of taxpayer resources.

At the same time, the bill does include important 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, H.R.2773 includes robust accountability mechanisms, including reporting, tracking and audit requirements subject to congressional, agency, 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, H.R.2773 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 Representatives Dingell and Fortenberry and their respective staffs for their work on this bill and we urge the Committee to move the bill to the full House for consideration.

Sincerely,



Todd Johnston
Vice President

Copy: Committee on Natural Resources Members, Rep. Fortenberry

