

# United States Senate

May 21, 2021

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
Chair  
Senate Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Ranking Member  
Senate Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

We write to request your continued support for endangered species recovery in the Fiscal Year 2022 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. Specifically, we are requesting increased funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Endangered Species Recovery Challenge Grant program.

We thank the members of the subcommittee for establishing the Recovery Challenge Grant in Fiscal Year 2018 and for their continued support for this program. Recovery Challenge Grants are an important tool for addressing the extinction crisis threatening our nation. The Recovery Challenge leverages private sector funding through a required match, which means that every taxpayer dollar going towards endangered species recovery through this grant must be matched by at least an equal amount from grantees. These grants leverage the scientific expertise and resources of nonprofit partners in the field to promote faster and more efficient recovery of endangered and threatened species.

The Recovery Challenge Grant program has grown from a relatively small program, lending support to a few key species, to an important cooperative force benefiting the recovery of myriad species. In Fiscal Year 2020, the Recovery Challenge Grant program supported 39 partnerships across the country to recover endangered and threatened species such as critically endangered Hawaiian birds, Stellar's eiders in Alaska, the American red wolf, Houston toads, and whooping cranes in the Eastern U.S.

One of the most iconic species supported by the Recovery Challenge Grant is the highly successful public-private partnership to save the California condor. Together, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State agencies, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, The Peregrine Fund, Oregon Zoo, Los Angeles Zoo, Ventana Wildlife Society, and several other nonprofit partners have provided critical genetic management, breeding, rearing, and releases into the wild to aid in the recovery of the iconic California condor. From a population low of 22 birds, the species is near being down-listed with a population that numbers more than 500 California condors, with more than 300 of which are living in the wild. The federal assistance provided by the Recovery Challenge Grant has helped make this recovery success story possible.

While the Recovery Challenge Grant program has proven extremely effective, there are many more species that remain in peril and the demand for these grants far exceeds the allocated funding. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received far more worthy applications than could be awarded. In order to ensure that species like the Southern Sea Otter, the Pacific Pocket Mouse,

Eastern Indigo Snake, Ozark Hellbender, and Florida Panther do not disappear, we need additional investment in this program.

As the Subcommittee develops the Fiscal Year 2022 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we urge you provide continued funding for endangered species recovery and prioritize recovery efforts in which resources and partner expertise can be most effectively leveraged. Specifically, we request an increase for Endangered Species Act Recovery actions to \$120 million and an increase for the Recovery Challenge Grant program to \$20 million. This funding will enable critical recovery partnerships to sustain their work and expand to new species that are imperiled.

Thank you for your attention to this important request.

Sincerely,

/s/ Alex Padilla  
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie Hirono  
United States Senator

/s/ Bob Menendez  
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden  
United States Senator