

March 19, 2021

Ms. Candace Vahlsing
Program Associate Director for Natural Resources
Office of Management & Budget
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear Ms. Vahlsing:

We, the undersigned hunting and fishing conservation organizations, representing America's 40 million hunters and anglers, are writing to support continuation of the efforts of the Department of the Interior (DOI) and enhancing the focus and efforts of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to maintain, conserve, and enhance big game migration corridors and seasonal ranges.

The Department of the Interior (DOI or Department), via Secretarial Order 3362, called for the prioritization of the conservation of big game winter ranges and migration corridors. This policy was an important step in focusing greater attention to areas where mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, and other species migrate, rest, or spend time in habitats critical to their lifecycles. Measures to conserve migration corridors and seasonal ranges not only facilitate unobstructed movement for wildlife to access forage and other resources, but also contribute to overall habitat resiliency to climate change across a wide range of ecological systems and contribute to larger-scale efforts to increase connectivity for numerous species. As you work to implement the priorities of the Biden Administration, we strongly encourage investment in this highly successful program that supports biodiversity and the resilience of these ecologically and economically important wildlife species and their habitats.

Over the last three years, federal and state agencies have partnered to conduct research of big game movements and to improve habitat for mule deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope. During this period, DOI made available over \$15 million for this program. This included funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Science Applications program to western states for state migration corridor research and planning, funding to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) for corridors mapping support, and funds to the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program and Bureau of Land Management that were transferred to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big Game and Migration Corridors Program (Program) for competitive grants to complete on-the-ground wildlife corridor conservation projects. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has more recently provided \$250,000 to the NFWF Program, and last fall called on its Regions and National Forests & Grasslands to engage with DOI and the States more actively in wildlife migration corridor conservation.

Unfortunately, FY21 funding for these efforts was redirected from existing agency budgets and programs, thus diminishing and/or competing for limited agency resources. In addition, neither the DOI or the Department of Agriculture has provided clear direction on incorporating the conservation of wildlife corridors in agency manuals, policies, and land use plans. Without this direction, and the additional funds necessary for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), USGS, USFWS, and the USFS to comprehensively engage in wildlife corridor conservation, there is a risk that this growing body of work to conserve important wildlife habitats – an effort integral to facilitating species' adaptation to climate change and to protecting 30 percent of the nation's lands and waters – could languish. Fortunately, this Administration has the opportunity to ensure that these efforts continue, are expanded to include other

species and critical summer range habitats and are more comprehensively implemented to result in durable conservation outcomes.

To maintain and improve implementation of policy directives that conserve wildlife migration corridors, it is requested that the President's proposed FY22 budget include the following budget amounts:

- **DOI Coordination and Support:** Over the past three years the coordinator and agency liaisons have contributed greatly to successful federal, state, tribal and stakeholder coordination on wildlife corridor research, planning, and conservation. However, previous funding for these positions was drawn from existing bureau and agency budgets. Dedicated funding in the Office of the Secretary would maintain and enhance the ongoing success of these efforts, while keeping bureau and agency budgets whole. **We recommend providing an additional \$1 million to the Office of the Secretary for support of the current national and regional wildlife migration corridor coordination and support positions.**
- **USGS Science and Mapping Support.** The USGS has provided critical technical assistance to the agencies and state and tribal wildlife departments through its Corridor Mapping Team led by the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit (CRU). Over the last three years the USGS – through reprogramming from other programs – has directed \$1 million for the analysis of big game movement data and corridor mapping. These investments have provided the spatial maps of migration corridors that are the basis for conservation; however, much work remains to be done, including mapping remaining corridors and assessing the effects on wildlife migrations from climate change. This Team works closely with the USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units that conduct complementary, high-priority research across the West to identify corridors, assess their threats, and test the effectiveness of conservation measures. **We recommend including an additional \$7 million in the USGS Ecosystems Mission Area budget, with \$5 million for the USGS Corridor Mapping Team efforts at the University of Wyoming CRU, and an additional \$2 million to support the core budget of the USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units to support migration corridor research.**
- **USFWS Science Applications Program.** The USFWS Science Applications Program has provided \$5.6 million to state fish and wildlife agencies to fund 41 state -defined priority research projects to identify and assess threats, including impacts of climate change, to migration corridors. Funding for state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies to continue to expand migration corridor research is critical to ensure that the best available science is informing management decisions. **We recommend increasing the budget for this program by \$3 million, specifically targeted at addressing state and tribal priorities for migration corridors research.**
- **BLM Migration Corridors Planning & Implementation.** The vast majority of BLM resource management plans do not recognize wildlife migration corridors, with potentially disastrous results. By not including wildlife migration corridors in land-use planning processes, decisions could be made that block or interrupt wildlife movements, and habitat improvement opportunities are likely to be overlooked. **We recommend increasing BLM's Resource Management Planning budget by \$3 million in FY22, with the additional funds targeted toward RMP amendments focused on the management of wildlife migration corridors, and specifically including a Colorado statewide RMP amendment for migration, as requested by the State of Colorado.**

We also recommend increasing BLM's Wildlife & Aquatic Habitat Management budget by \$3 million, to provide resources to support BLM's wildlife migration corridors conservation efforts. Our overall recommendation is to increase BLM's Wildlife & Aquatic Habitat Management budget from \$132 million (FY21 enacted) to \$137 million, which includes the \$2 million NFWF budget recommendation below.

- **Dedicated Wildlife Corridors Funding for NFWF.** Over the past three years NFWF has established its Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big Game and Migration Corridors Program to provide competitive grants for wildlife migration corridor projects, largely on public lands. This Program has been highly successful, receiving far more requests for funding than NFWF has the resources for, and generated nearly \$30 million in matching funds from states and private sources. The Program is supported via pass-through funding from BLM, the USFS, and the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, redirected from other agency priorities. Dedicated funding for this Program over and above existing NFWF appropriations would ensure its continued success and remove the impacts to agency budgets while maintaining strong agency ties to the NFWF Program. **We recommend increasing BLM's Wildlife & Aquatic Habitat Management and the USFS Watershed, Fish, Wildlife, Air and Rare Plants budgets by an additional \$2 million each, with the funds specifically directed to the NFWF Program.**
- **USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.** This program has been critical for landowner engagement and migration corridor conservation on private lands. **We ask that the President's FY22 Budget increase overall funding for this program by \$2M to benefit the migration corridor initiative, \$1.5M for an internal grant process targeted for migration corridor conservation and \$500,000 directed to NFWF for winter range and migration corridor habitat conservation.**

These funding priorities are critically important to maintain current efforts, which has widespread support from state and tribal wildlife agencies, and a wide diversity of both hunting and non-hunting based non-governmental conservation organizations. Please contact us if you need any further information or clarifications, we look forward to working with you on a budget that supports the needs of wildlife.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
California Waterfowl
Camp Fire Club of America
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Houston Safari Club
Izaak Walton League of America
Mule Deer Foundation
National Deer Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wild Turkey Federation

National Wildlife Refuge Association
Orion: The Hunter's Institute
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Ruffed Grouse Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi
Wild Sheep Foundation