

September 23, 2021

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Graham,

The undersigned South Carolina and national organizations are comprised of millions of Americans, who hunt, fish, camp, hike, paddle, and appreciate our great outdoors. We appreciate the leadership you have shown in advancing key conservation priorities like the Great American Outdoors Act and the bipartisan infrastructure package that includes critical investments for communities and wildlife.

We are writing today to request your leadership on another piece of bipartisan legislation that offers a solution to the crisis facing our nation's – and South Carolina's – fish, wildlife, and natural infrastructure. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (S. 2372, H.R. 2773) represents a smart, future-focused investment that can prevent one-third of our nation's fish and wildlife from becoming threatened or endangered while creating a significant number of jobs that support the outdoor economy and other key sectors such as agriculture and forestry. We respectfully request that you cosponsor the Recovering America's Wildlife Act and support its passage in the 117th Congress.

The U.S. and South Carolina are lucky to have an incredible number of fish and wildlife species, many of which are thriving because of the foresight hunters and anglers had over a century ago to bring prized game species back from the brink of extinction through professional, collaborative wildlife management. However, today an increasing number of species are in steep decline – increasing their possibility of becoming endangered. The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) alone has identified more than 800 species in need of proactive conservation. In total, state fish and wildlife agencies have identified 12,000 species that need proactive funding nationwide before more costly measures are necessary.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will address this crisis by providing \$1.3 billion for States and Territories and \$97.5 million to Tribal nations annually for proactive, on-the-ground conservation projects outlined in the Congressionally mandated, but severely underfunded, State Wildlife Action Plans, and is paid for by directing fees and penalties collected from environmental violations that aren't already targeted to existing programs. The SCDNR would receive more than \$14 million each year to implement habitat restoration, wildlife management, research, and projects that support outdoor recreation – as outlined in the South Carolina plan. These plans allow communities to have input on how their natural resources are managed, and ensures projects are being executed in partnership with local groups and stakeholders.

South Carolina's economy would directly benefit from passage of this legislation. More than half of South Carolinians participate in outdoor recreation, generating 101,000 direct jobs and \$16.3 billion in consumer spending. Investing in outdoor recreation also supports South Carolina's burgeoning tourism industry. Annually, more than 11 million of South Carolina's visitors participate in some form of outdoor recreation during their trip, providing economic development opportunities for all regions, including inland and rural communities. Wildlife and healthy habitats are also essential to our nation's \$778 billion outdoor economy – an economy that provides 5.2 million jobs and represents 2.2 percent of the gross national product. The outdoor recreation economy historically shows higher increases in real gross

output, compensation, and employment than the national economy. Every million dollars invested in species and habitat restoration creates between 17-33 jobs. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act has the potential to create between 28,000 and 33,600 jobs every year, while adding 3.36 billion of national economic output.

The upstream solution this legislation provides will also save taxpayers money in the long run by reducing the need for regulation, and sometimes litigation, under the Endangered Species Act. By investing in collaborative partnerships in South Carolina—and in every State and Territory and on Tribal lands—we can save at-risk species at the local level, preventing them from needing federal intervention and “emergency room” measures. Numerous industries in South Carolina (agriculture, forest product companies, and others) will benefit from the increased regulatory certainty this approach can provide. Additionally, accelerating the recovery of the 48 species in South Carolina already listed under the Endangered Species Act and preventing more species from requiring listing will reduce both current and future regulatory challenges companies face.

Finally, this legislation builds upon the successes Congress has had over the last several years and months to expand and protect our outdoor heritage, and ensures States, Territories, and Tribes have the resources they need to fulfill their role as the primary managers of fish and wildlife within their borders. We cannot fully protect our wildlife, lands, and waters without the work they do on-the-ground, and we know supporting these agencies through the conservation model utilized in the Recovering America's Wildlife Act works. Dedicated funding generated through excise taxes on firearms has facilitated the recovery of wild turkeys, deer, and elk, and now we must do the same for all at-risk species.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will create near-immediate jobs; support our nation's fish, wildlife, and outdoor economy; and reduce long-term wildlife and habitat management costs. Importantly, it will ensure future generations are able to experience the full diversity of wildlife that helps make all our outdoor experiences memorable.

South Carolina needs a real champion in the U.S. Senate to support and push for the passage of this legislation, so we thank you for considering our request that you sign on as a cosponsor of S.2372.

Sincerely,

Audubon South Carolina

Harry R.E. Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund Inc.

National Deer Association

National Wild Turkey Federation, SC State Chapter

National Wildlife Federation

South Carolina Boating & Fishing Alliance

South Carolina Wildlife Federation