

September 28, 2021

The Honorable Jim Inhofe
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Inhofe,

The undersigned Oklahoma 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 *America's Conservation Enhancement Act*.

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 Oklahoma'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 Oklahoma are lucky to have an incredible amount 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 Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) alone has identified more than 300 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. The legislation is paid for by directing fees and penalties collected from environmental violations that aren't already targeted to existing programs. The ODWC would receive more than \$16 million each year to implement habitat restoration, wildlife management, research, and projects that support outdoor recreation – as outlined in the Oklahoma plan that was developed collaboratively with sportsmen, universities, ag producers, and conservation organizations. 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.

Oklahoma's economy would directly benefit from passage of this legislation. Oklahoma's outdoor recreation generates \$10.6 billion in consumer spending annually, creating 97,000 direct jobs. 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 Oklahoma—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 Oklahoma (agriculture, forest product companies, and others) will benefit from the increased regulatory certainty this approach can provide. Additionally, accelerating the recovery of the 20 species in Oklahoma already listed under the Endangered Species Act with three species proposed and under review 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 by ensuring 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 modeled utilized in the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* works. Dedicated funding generated through excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, fishing tackle, and motorboat fuel has facilitated the recovery of highly popular species such as wild turkeys, deer, elk, striped bass, 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.

Thank you for considering our request to cosponsor and support passage of this legislation. We stand ready to help, and would welcome the opportunity to talk to you more about this historic opportunity.

Sincerely,

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
American Sportfishing Association
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
National Deer Association
Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever
National Wild Turkey Federation
Tulsa Urban Wilderness Coalition
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Oklahoma Falconers Association
Save the Illinois River

Conservation Coalition of Oklahoma
Trout Unlimited
Tulsa Bird Dog Association
Land Legacy
Tulsa Audubon Society
All Souls Unitarian Green Team
National Wildlife Federation
Spring Creek Coalition
The Nature Conservancy