

October 11, 2022

Candace Vahlsing
Associate Director for Climate, Energy, Environment, and Science
Office of Management & Budget
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear Associate Director Vahlsing:

The below signed hunting, wildlife conservation, and professional societies are writing to support the efforts of the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) as they implement administration priorities to maintain, conserve, and enhance wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges, especially for big game species.

To successfully implement these priorities, specific and sufficient funding is necessary. Historically, funding for these efforts has been redirected from existing agency budgets and programs, competing for limited agency resources. This uncertain and underfunded approach has created challenges for consistent implementation by the agencies and their partners from year to year. We are asking OMB to work with the agencies as they develop the President's Fiscal Year 2024 budget to consolidate and target sufficient funding to address the needs of conserving wildlife migration corridors and ranges.

Over the past several years, DOI has made available \$15m to implement Secretarial Order 3362 by asking its agencies to redirect funding from existing programs rather than clearly delineating necessary funding across agency budgets. We ask OMB to work with DOI and USDA to create a concise, targeted crosscut wildlife corridors budget to ensure year to year consistency and a reliable programmatic approach to wildlife corridors conservation, and we have identified several programs that contribute to wildlife migration corridors in the attached addendum for your consideration.

Further, designating a specific allocation of \$10m annually from the America the Beautiful Challenge funds for wildlife corridor projects on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and US Forest Service (USFS) lands, and increasing the USFS participation in the Challenge by contributing IJIA and IRA wildfire risk and hazardous fuels reduction funds, activities critical to maintaining wildlife corridors, to support this allocation would ensure that this Administration priority is addressed.

In addition to the specific funding recommendations above, we strongly recommend increasing BLM and USFS contributions to NFWF's Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big Game and Migration Corridors Program. The Infrastructure and Investment Job Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act provide the agencies extensive funding for on the ground conservation efforts, however little of this has been specifically targeted at wildlife migration corridors. We recommend redirecting \$5m each from existing USFS (wildfire risk & hazardous fuels) and BLM (conservation, ecosystem and habitat restoration) IIJA and IRA funds to this program annually. We also recommend making the match requirements for this Program match those of the America the Beautiful Challenge.

As you know, the administration has emphasized the need for the conservation of wildlife migration corridors, as highlighted in the *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful* report. We appreciate this focus on wildlife migration, noting that measures to conserve big game 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 changing conditions across a wide range of ecological systems and contribute to larger-scale efforts to increase connectivity for numerous species.

We are encouraged by federal efforts to provide guidance on wildlife corridor conservation at DOI and USDA, as well as underlying support by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). These efforts complement ongoing efforts by DOI to implement Secretarial Order 3362, and the work of Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) under its “Working Lands for Wildlife” and other programs. We applaud recent efforts by USDA and the USFS to emphasize the need to address conservation of wildlife corridors, specifically Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack’s issuance of Secretarial Memo 1077 and the USFS guidance to Regional Foresters, “Habitat Connectivity and Migration Corridors in National Forest System Planning.”

We look forward to working with the federal agencies to implement these directives, but guidance and policies are only as effective as the funding behind them. Funding to support agencies, and their State, Tribal and other public and private partners, to engage in wildlife corridor conservation and to implement high-priority on-the-ground conservation actions, are critically needed. Targeted funding for the BLM, US Geological Survey, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the USFS to comprehensively implement wildlife corridor conservation ensures that the Administration’s priorities and this growing body of work to conserve important wildlife habitats does not falter.

These funding priorities are critically important to maintain current efforts, which has widespread support from state 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 & Wildlife Agencies
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Boone and Crockett Club
California Waterfowl Association
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
Delta Waterfowl
Houston Safari Club
Mule Deer Foundation
National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative
National Deer Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Wildlife Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion: The Hunter’s Institute
Pheasants Forever
Pope and Young Club
Quail Forever

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Sportsmen's Alliance
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Management Institute

CC:

Mary Fischietto, Interior Branch Chief, OMB
Mark Hazelgren, Senior Program Examiner, OMB
Michael Hagan, Senior Program Examiner, OMB
Jacob Glass, Program Examiner, OMB

Addendum

To maintain and improve wildlife migration corridors, we request that the President's proposed FY24 budget include the following budget amounts:

- **DOI Coordination and Support:** Over the past five 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 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 wildlife departments through its Corridor Mapping Team led by the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit (CRU). Over the last five years the USGS has directed over \$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 and especially the effects on wildlife migrations from climate change. **We recommend including an additional \$5 million in the USGS Land Management Research budget, with specific direction to direct these funds towards wildlife corridor mapping and research.**
- **USFWS Science Applications Program.** The USFWS Science Applications Program has provided significant funding for several years to state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies for state defined priority research projects to identify and assess threats 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 \$5 million in FY24, with the additional funds targeted toward RMP amendments focused on the management of wildlife migration corridors. 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 \$5 million (\$7 million overall including the NFWF funding request below), to provide resources to support BLM's wildlife migration corridors conservation efforts.

- **Dedicated Wildlife Corridors Funding for NFWF.** Over the past four years NFWF has provided

competitive grants from its Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big Game and Migration Corridors Program 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, however dedicated funding for this Program over and above existing NFWF appropriations would ensure its continued success and minimize 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 FY24 Budget increase overall funding for this program by \$2M, \$1.5M for an internal grant process and \$500,000 directed to NFWF for winter range and migration corridor habitat conservation.**