

November 20, 2025

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
S-146, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-307, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1036 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**Re: Oppose Harmful Endangered Species Act and Anti-Wildlife Riders in Any Final FY2026 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Legislation**

Dear Chair Collins, Ranking Member Murray, Chair Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro,

On behalf of our organizations and our millions of members and supporters, we urge you to ensure that any final FY 2026 Interior appropriations bill is free of riders that undermine the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and protections for wildlife.

The House Interior bill contains a total of at least 17 anti-wildlife poison pill riders—the largest number of anti-wildlife policy riders that has ever been included in the base bill in the history of the Endangered Species Act. In addition, the Senate Interior bill still includes the long-standing rider denying ESA protections to the imperiled sage-grouse. These riders would cause irreparable harm by undoing decades of progress to stabilize and recover some of our most iconic species. They are also completely out of step with the American public, which overwhelmingly supports the Act and protections for wildlife. In addition, the House bill would cut the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s endangered species listing budget by nearly \$15 million (66 percent), effectively dismantling the program in charge of determining which animals and plants deserve protection under the Endangered Species Act. Thus, we urge you to please ensure that funding is maintained at no less than enacted levels and that the following provisions are not included in any final appropriations bill:

**FY 2026 House Interior Appropriations Bill – H.R. 4754**

**Sec. 116 - Blocks Protections for the Sage-Grouse.** This rider would block the Service from considering whether to protect the Greater sage-grouse, or any distinct population of Greater sage-grouse, as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The sage grouse population has declined 40% rangewide over the last two decades and continues on a downward trend. Endangered Species Act protections are desperately needed to save this bird from extinction.

**Sec. 117 – Blocks Multistate Sagebrush Habitat Protection Plan.** This rider would block the Bureau of Land Management from finalizing its revised management plan for nearly 70 million acres of sagebrush habitat across 10 states. Protecting this ecosystem not only benefits the greater sage grouse,

but also hundreds of other species that depend on the Sagebrush Sea ecosystem including pygmy rabbits, pronghorns, elk, mule deer, golden eagles, native trout, and migratory and resident birds.

**Sec. 125 – Prevents Agencies from Regulating Lead Ammunition and Tackle.** This rider would block federal agencies from regulating the use of poisonous lead ammunition or fishing gear, which can harm endangered species like whooping cranes that ingest lead when feeding in fields and waterways. A 2022 study found that half of bald and golden eagles are suffering from chronic, toxic levels of lead due to lead ammunition.

**Sec. 126 – Blocks Protections for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken.** The lesser prairie-chicken is a highly imperiled ground-nesting bird that has declined to roughly 27,000 individuals — including at least a decline of 20% since 2021 — and its current population may now be well below even that number. It is found in less than 10% of its former habitats. After nearly three decades of waiting for protection, the Service issued a final rule in November 2022 protecting the lesser prairie-chicken under the Endangered Species Act. This rider would block funding to implement or enforce the rule.

**Sec. 127 – Blocks Increased Protections for Northern Long-Eared Bats.** Northern long-eared bats have declined 99% across most of their range in a span of just two decades. White-nose syndrome, caused by an exotic fungus originating in Europe, has devastated this species. However, human activities are now exacerbating the bats' catastrophic decline. The Fish and Wildlife Service listed the bat as endangered in November 2022 after finding that its previous “threatened” status was not sufficiently protective to keep the bat from slipping further toward extinction. Nonetheless this rider would block funding to implement the listing rule.

**Sec. 128 – Delists the Gray Wolf Nationwide.** This legislation would remove federal protections for all gray wolves in the lower-48 states, except for a small population of Mexican gray wolves in Arizona and New Mexico. Gray wolf populations in the United States were decimated by decades of predator control programs, as well as loss of habitat and prey. Since receiving protection under the Endangered Species Act, the gray wolf has begun a comeback but remains far from recovered.

**Sec. 129 – Blocks Protections for Wolverines.** After waiting nearly 30 years for protection, the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a final rule in November 2023 protecting wolverines as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. This rare wilderness species is threatened with massive habitat loss due to climate change. No more than 300 wolverines remain in the lower 48 states. This rider would block funding to implement or enforce the final rule.

**Sec. 130 – North Cascades Grizzly Bear Ecosystem Reintroduction Plan.** This rider would block funding for the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service to implement the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Ecosystem Restoration Plan, which aims to restore grizzly bears to the North Cascades. The plan involves transporting grizzly bears into the region from other areas with more robust grizzly populations, an essential step to recovering grizzly bears in the North Cascades.

**Sec. 131 – Bitterroot Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Reintroduction.** This rider would block funding for the Fish and Wildlife Service to restore grizzly bears to the Bitterroot Ecosystem of Montana and Idaho. Although historical records reveal that grizzlies once occurred throughout this area, it has at most only a few bears now. The Bitterroot Ecosystem encompasses one of the largest contiguous blocks of Federal land remaining in the lower 48 states and is ideal for grizzly bear recovery.

**Sec. 132 – Exemption for Captive Fish Under the Endangered Species Act.** This vague rider, which appears to benefit less than five commercial caviar sellers in Florida, would exempt all captive fish from the requirements of the Endangered Species Act, regardless of the impacts on conservation efforts for salmon, steelhead and domestic sturgeon species, all of which are held in captive breeding programs or hatcheries to further their recovery. Furthermore, exempting the small handful of commercial caviar producers from the decades-old requirements of the Act would undermine conservation efforts around the world, and likely result in more illegal caviar trade benefitting hostile nations including Russia.

**Sec. 133 – Charles M. Russel National Wildlife Refuge.** This rider would block the Secretary of Interior from returning wild, free-ranging bison to their native homes on the refuge. These federal lands contain some of the most unique and viable native short grass habitat in Montana and support a variety of prairie wildlife species.

**Sec. 134 – Blocks Revisions to Harmful Endangered Species Act Regulations.** This rider undermines the Endangered Species Act and the federal agency rulemaking process by blocking the Fish and Wildlife Service from implementing or enforcing its 2024 final regulations that reversed or revised the previous administration’s rules gutting Section 4 (listing and critical habitat) and Section 7 (interagency consultations) of the Endangered Species Act.

**Sec. 138 – Consultation Exemptions for Land Management Plans.** This rider would codify climate denialism into law by exempting the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management from updating their land management plans when a species becomes listed, new critical habitat is designated, or new information—which often includes new data on the severe impacts of climate change on species—demonstrates that endangered species are being harmed or killed on our nation's public lands.

**Sec. 147 – Delists the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Population of Grizzly Bears.** This rider would remove Endangered Species Act protections for grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The Yellowstone grizzly bear population remains isolated and under threat from climate change-induced habitat and ecological changes. Increasingly aggressive hunting and trapping policies for large carnivores in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming indicate that grizzly bear recovery would come to grinding halt if Endangered Species Act protections were lifted.

**Sec. 435 – Prevents Agencies from Regulating Lead Content of Ammunition and Tackle.** Similar to Sec. 125, this rider would block federal agencies from regulating the lead content in ammunition or fishing gear under the Toxic Substances Control Act or any other law.

**Sec. 502 – Blocks Protections for Seven Texas Freshwater Mussels.** This amendment would block protections for seven imperiled freshwater mussels in Texas and their critical habitat. These seven mussels—including the Texas pimpleback, Guadalupe orb, Texas fatmucket, Guadalupe fatmucket, false spike, Balcones spike, and Texas fawnsfoot—have waited for between 16 and 17 years to receive protection. These mussels are disappearing because of pollution, sediment, diversions, dams and development, as well as droughts, heat waves, and violent floods caused by global warming.

**Sec. 503 – Blocks the expansion of the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge in Texas.** The refuge expansion is a crucial step for the recovery of the lesser prairie-chicken. The expansion would help protect and restore vanishing grassland landscapes that provide essential habitat to the prairie chicken, as well as other species including pronghorn and sandhill cranes.

## **FY 2026 Senate Interior Appropriations Bill – S. 2431**

**Sec. 119 – Blocks Protections for Sage-Grouse.** Similar to Sec.116 of the House bill, this rider continues the perennial rider which has been included in Interior appropriations bills since 2014 prohibiting the Fish and Wildlife Service from considering greater sage-grouse and the Columbia Basin distinct population segment of the species for protection under the Endangered Species Act. However, the Senate rider differs from the House version in that it does not expand the language to include any distinct population of greater sage-grouse.

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As we face an accelerating and unprecedented wildlife extinction crisis, now more than ever we need Congress to uphold our environmental laws and protect our nation's most vulnerable animals and plants. For these reasons, we urge you to support no less than enacted funding levels for endangered species and to ensure that these anti-wildlife riders are not included in any final appropriations package.

Sincerely,

Alaska Wilderness League  
American Bird Conservancy  
Animal Defenders International  
Animal Legal Defense Fund  
Animal Protection New Mexico  
Animal Welfare Institute  
Animal Wonders KC  
Attorneys for Animals  
Bird Alliance of Oregon  
Birds Georgia  
Born Free USA  
CalWild  
Cascade Forest Conservancy  
Cascadia Wildlands  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks  
Concerned Citizen  
Conservation Northwest  
Creation Justice Ministries  
DC Natives  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Earthjustice Action  
Endangered Habitats League  
Endangered Species Coalition  
Environmental Center of San Diego  
Environmental Law & Policy Center  
Environmental Protection Information Center - EPIC  
FOUR PAWS USA  
Friends of Blackwater, Inc.  
Friends of Merrymeeting Bay  
Friends of Nevada Wilderness

Friends of the Earth Action  
Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project  
Great Lakes Wildlife Alliance  
Great Old Broads for Wilderness  
GreenLatinos  
Greenpeace USA  
Guardians of the Wolves  
Heartwood  
Hip Hop Caucus  
Humane World Action Fund  
Humane World for Animals  
International Fund for Animal Welfare - IFAW  
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute  
Izaak Walton League Rapid City, South Dakota Chapter  
John Muir Project  
Kettle Range Conservation Group  
Kids for Saving Earth  
Klamath Forest Alliance  
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center  
Large Carnivore Fund  
League of Conservation Voters  
Legal Rights for the Salish Sea  
Los Angeles Audubon Society  
Los Padres ForestWatch  
Maine Audubon  
Methow Valley Citizens Council  
National Wolfwatcher Coalition  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
New Hampshire Audubon  
Next 100 Coalition  
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness  
Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative  
NYC Plover Project  
Oceana  
Oregon Natural Desert Association  
Oregon Wild  
Partnership for Policy Integrity  
People and Pollinators Action Network  
Pilchuck Audubon Society (Snohomish, WA)  
Plan B to Save Wolves  
Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park  
Predator Defense  
Project Coyote  
Project Eleven Hundred  
Quiet Use Coalition  
Resource Renewal Institute  
Rockbridge Conservation  
Sage Steppe Wild  
San Juan Citizens Alliance

Save Animals Facing Extinction  
Save Our Sky Blue Waters  
Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition  
Save the Manatee Club  
Sawtooth Science Institute  
Sea Turtle Conservancy  
Shining Horizons Land Management, LLC  
Sierra Club  
Silvix Resources  
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance  
Species Unite  
Team Wolf  
The Cougar Fund  
The Urban Wildlands Group  
Turtle Island Restoration Network  
Western Environmental Law Center  
Western Nebraska Resources Council  
Western Watersheds Project  
Western Wildlife Conservancy  
Western Wildlife Outreach  
Wild Cumberland  
WildEarth Guardians  
Wildlife for All  
Willamette Riverkeeper  
Wolf and Wildlife Advocates  
Wolf Conservation Center  
Wolf Hollow  
Wolf Welcome Committee  
Wolves of the Rockies  
Wyoming Coalition for Animal Protection  
Wyoming Untrapped  
Wyoming Wildlife Advocates  
Yaak Valley Forest Council

CC: The Honorable John Thune  
The Honorable Charles Schumer  
The Honorable Mike Johnson  
The Honorable Steve Scalise  
The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries