Re: Reject Damaging Endangered Species Act Riders in FY 2018 Spending Legislation

Dear Leaders McConnell, Schumer, Pelosi, and Speaker Ryan:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters nationwide, we write to urge you to reject all policy riders on year-end legislation that would erode the Endangered Species Act and other safeguards for wildlife. Unfortunately, damaging provisions that would undermine the Endangered Species Act are included in the House Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill (H.R. 3354) and the Senate Chairman’s Mark of the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill. If enacted, any of these riders would be highly detrimental to the future of imperiled species conservation. While this letter focuses on riders that would undermine vital wildlife protections, we also strongly oppose all other anti-environmental riders that would undermine protections for our lands, water, and air.

The Endangered Species Act remains the most effective and important law to protect animal and plant species at risk of extinction. The Endangered Species Act has successfully prevented the extinction of 99 percent of the species placed under its protection, including the bald eagle, the brown pelican, and the humpback whale. It is also one of our most popular conservation laws. According to a June 2015 poll, 90 percent of American voters support the Endangered Species Act.

Nevertheless, the House FY 2018 Interior/EPA appropriations bill has once again become a minefield of reckless riders aimed at weakening this bedrock conservation law. This year's bill contains provisions that would strip federal protections for iconic American wildlife including the gray wolf, the Mexican gray wolf, the sage-grouse, and the Preble’s meadow jumping mouse. Such decisions should be based on the best available science, rather than political considerations that fall outside the framework of the Act. Still, another provision would block federal funding for listed species if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or National Marine Fisheries Service (the Services) fails to complete its five-year reviews on time. If passed, this legislative language would suspend all federal conservation actions for over 900 endangered and threatened species with past-due five-year reviews. This translates to roughly 54 percent of all listed species. The Services currently lack the funds to complete timely reviews. Endangered and threatened species should not be made to suffer and decline toward extinction because the Services lack adequate funding to fulfill their responsibilities. Yet another provision would block a Department of the Interior rule to conserve native carnivores on federally protected preserves in Alaska. Finally, for a fourth year running, the bill includes a rider that prevents the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) from taking any steps to list the sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act. In September 2015, FWS determined that the greater sage-grouse was not warranted for listing under the Endangered Species Act, citing an unprecedented landscape-scale planning process as reducing threats to sage-grouse. That plan will almost certainly be weakened under a new process initiated by Interior Secretary Zinke, yet this amendment would prevent a listing for sage-grouse, even if this species slips even closer to extinction.
The Senate FY 2018 Interior/EPA appropriations bill contains two of the same riders that attack protections for gray wolves and sage grouse. Additionally, the Senate bill includes a rider that would prevent FWS from even considering listing the imperiled lesser prairie-chicken. It also contains a highly damaging rider that would override the longstanding Endangered Species Act Section 7 requirement of re-initiation of interagency consultation once a species is listed, critical habitat is designated, or new pertinent information on a listed species becomes available.

The conservation challenges America faces today are even greater and more complex than they were when the Endangered Species Act was first enacted. We face the reality of climate change and other enormous threats to our planet’s biodiversity—which in turn threaten our own survival as a species. Clearly, now is not the time to weaken the best tool our nation has to combat what scientists have determined is the sixth major extinction phase experienced on this planet.

Our organizations are grateful that the final FY 2017 omnibus appropriations package enacted earlier this year did not contain any new riders undermining endangered species conservation. Such harmful riders have no place in the appropriations context and only serve to chip away at one of America’s most popular and effective environmental laws. We urge you to again stand for wildlife by flatly rejecting all harmful anti-wildlife measures on final spending legislation for FY 2018.

Respectfully,

Advocates for Snake Preservation
Advocates for the West
Alaska Wilderness League
Alaska Wildlife Alliance
All-Creatures.org
American Bird Conservancy
American Conservation Film Festival
American Forests
American Rivers
American University Animal Law Society
American University Environmental Law Society
Amphibian Ark
Animal Advocates of Western New York
Animal Welfare Institute
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.
Arizona Center for Nature Conservation/Phoenix Zoo
Arkansas Audubon Society
Asociación Ecosistemas Andinos
Association of Zoos & Aquariums
Audubon Connecticut
Audubon Naturalist Society
Audubon New York
Audubon of Kansas, Inc.
Audubon Society of Rhode Island
Basin and Range Watch
Bat Conservation International
Berkshire Environmental Action Team, Inc. (BEAT)
Black Hills Clean Water Alliance
Blank Park Zoo
Blue Heron Productions
Bluestem Farms - Douglas County, Kansas
Born Free USA
Boulder Rights of Nature, Inc.
Buffalo Field Campaign
Burroughs Audubon Society of Greater Kansas City
Buttonwood Park Zoological Society
California Wolf Center
Californians for Western Wilderness
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Food Safety
Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition
Central Florida Zoo & Botanical Gardens
Cetacean Society International
Clean Water Action
Cleveland Zoological Society
Colorado Native Plant Society
Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center
Columbus Zoo and Aquarium and The Wilds
Conejos Clean Water
Connecticut’s Beardsley Zoo
Conservation Council for Hawai‘i
Cottonwood Environmental Law Center
Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust
Cumberland-Harpeth Audubon Society
Dallas Zoo Management, Inc.
Defenders of Wildlife
Delaware Center for the Inland Bays
Delaware Ecumenical Council on Children and Families
Detroit Zoological Society
E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation
Earth Ethics, Inc.
Earthjustice
Eastern State College
EcoFlight
EDF Action
El Paso Zoological Society
Ellen Trout Zoo
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Small Animal Conservation Fund
Endangered Species Coalition
Endangered Wolf Center
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin
Environmental Protection Information Center
Essential Information
Footloose Montana
Forests Forever
Foundation for Global Sustainability
Friends of Blackwater
Friends of Nevada Wilderness
Friends of the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge (FAR)
Friends of the Capital Crescent Trail
Friends of the Richmond Hills
Friends of the Wisconsin Wolf & Wildlife
Friends of Whitehaven Park
Fund for Wild Nature
Gallatin Wildlife Association
Grand Canyon Trust
Grand Canyon Wildlands Council
Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Greater Hells Canyon Council
Greater Yellowstone Coalition
Green Science Policy Institute
Greenpeace
Heartwood
Hip Hop Caucus
Hoosier Environmental Council
Houston Zoo
Howling For Wolves
Humane Society Legislative Fund
Idaho Conservation League
IECAN
Inland Ocean Coalition
International Fund for Animal Welfare
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Iowa Audubon
Kentucky Heartwood
Kettle Range Conservation Group
Klamath Forest Alliance
Kootenai Environmental Alliance
KS Wild
Kunak Ecological Studies
Lincoln Park Zoo
Living with Wolves
Los Padres ForestWatch
Louisiana Audubon Council
Maine Audubon
Marine Mammal Alliance Nantucket
Marine Resources Council
Mass Audubon
Miami Waterkeeper
Midwest Environmental Advocates
Milwaukee County Zoological Gardens
Missouri Botanical Garden
Montana Audubon
Montana Conservation Voters
Montana Environmental Information Center
Montana Native Plant Society
Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center
Mystic Aquarium
Naples Zoo
National Audubon Society
National Wolfwatcher Coalition
Native Plant Conservation Campaign
Natural Resources Council of Maine
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nature Abounds
Nevada Wildlife Alliance
Nevada Native Plant Society
New England Wild Flower Society
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
NH Animal Rights League, Inc.
North Cascades Conservation Council
Northcoast Environmental Center
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems
Northern Alaska Environmental Center
Northwest Environmental Advocates
NYC Audubon
Oceana
Oklahoma City Zoo
One More Generation
Orca Network
Oregon Natural Desert Association
Oregon Wild
Orleans Audubon Society
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Patagonia Area Resource Alliance
Pelican Island Audubon Society
Pollinate Minnesota
Potter Park Zoo
Power Shift Network
Predator Defense
Protect Our Wildlife
Quality Parks
Raptors Are The Solution
Red River Zoo
Representing future generations
RESTORE: The North Woods
Riverkeeper, Inc.
Rocky Mountain Recreation Initiative
Rocky Mountain Wild
Roger Williams Park Zoo
Rolling Hills Zoo
Roosevelt Park Zoo
Rosamond Gifford Zoo
S.P.E.C.I.E.S.
Saint Louis Zoo
Salem Audubon Society
San Antonio Zoological Society
San Juan Citizens Alliance
Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society
Santa Barbara Zoo
Save Animals Facing Extinction
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition
SAVE THE FROGS!
Save the Manatee Club
Save Wolves Now Network
Scovill Zoo
Sea Shepherd Legal
Selkirk Conservation Alliance
Sheep Mountain Alliance
Sierra Club
Smoky Hills Audubon Society
South West Wisconsin Area Progressives
Southern Illinoisans Against Fracturing Our Environment
Southern Maryland Audubon Society
Southwest Environmental Center
The Connecticut Audubon Society
The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs
The Humane Society of the United States
The Imani Group, Inc.
The Institute for Bird Populations
The Living Desert
The Ocean Foundation
The Rewilding Institute
The Urban Wildlands Group
The Wilderness Society
Toledo Zoo and Aquarium
Trevor Zoo
Tucson Audubon Society
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Upper Gila Watershed Alliance
Urban Wildlife Research Project
Utah Rivers Council
Ventana Wilderness Alliance
Vet Voice Foundation
Voices of Wildlife in NH
Waterkeeper Alliance
WE ACT for Environmental Justice
West Virginia Rivers Coalition
Western Watersheds Project
Western Wildlife Conservancy
Western Wildlife Outreach
Whidbey Environmental Action Network
White Oak Conservation
Wild Connections
Wild Utah Project
WildEarth Guardians
Wilderness Workshop
Wildlands Network
Wildlife Alliance of Maine
Wildlife Center of Virginia
WildWest Institute
Wolf Conservation Center
Wolf Haven International
Woodland Park Zoo
Wyoming Untrapped
Zoo Knoxville
Zoo New England