



*Bringing back the birds*

## **FY 2019 Appropriations - Bird Conservation Issues**

On behalf of American Bird Conservancy and our supporters, please support effective bird conservation programs, and oppose harmful policy riders and proposed funding cuts in the FY 2019 Interior Appropriations bill that would erode the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and undermine the recovery of listed U.S. birds. We are particularly concerned about the declining conservation status of one-third of all U.S. migratory bird species, the ESA listing exemption, budget cuts and renewed threats to the Greater Sage-Grouse, and the impact of proposed funding cuts for the conservation of critically endangered birds in Hawaii.

***Please Increase the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act to \$6.5 million.***

***Please Increase Migratory Bird Joint Ventures to \$19.9 million.***

***Please Restore State of the Birds Activities for Critically Endangered Hawaiian Birds.***

***Please Oppose Cuts to Endangered Species and Sage Grouse Conservation.***

***Please Oppose Harmful Environmental Policy Changes.***

### **Please Increase Funding for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act**

Since 2002, the [Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act](#) (NMBCA) has functioned as a matching grant program to fund projects that conserve neotropical migratory birds--those that breed in or migrate through the United States and Canada and spend the non-breeding season in Latin America and the Caribbean. NMBCA has helped conserve 400 species, representing more than 4 billion birds, including some of the most endangered birds in North America. All NMBCA grant requests must be matched with non-federal funds at least 3 to 1, and to date, the match has been 4 to 1. Please support increasing NMBCA to \$6.5 million.

### **Please Increase Funding for Migratory Bird Joint Ventures**

[Migratory Bird Joint Ventures](#) are regional partnerships managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that identify conservation priorities and carry out projects to reverse population declines of at-risk bird species. The Joint Ventures (JVs) are essential to address the conservation needs of migratory birds, and they leverage significant matching contributions from partner organizations and foundations. Nationally, JVs have protected, restored, or enhanced more than 22 million acres of important habitat for migratory bird species. Since the program's inception in 1986, Joint Ventures have conserved over 22 million acres of critical habitat for wildlife and people and leveraged 34 dollars of support for every federal dollar spent. We urge that the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures be fully funded at \$19.9 million.

## **Please Increase Endangered Species Recovery Funding**

The administration's FY 2019 budget request would significantly set back the protection and recovery of endangered species. The budget proposes to cut the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Ecological Services program by \$26.6 million. Among the conservation cuts include -\$2.975 million for Gulf Coast Restoration, -\$1.48 million for the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem, and -\$2.88 million for Candidate Conservation. While some funds have been added to Recovery, new rules to downgrade or delist are not a high conservation priority given the restoration and recovery needs of other listed species.

The Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund is proposed for elimination, and State and Tribal Wildlife Grants are severely cut. A \$53 million dollar reduction to Cooperative Endangered Species and a \$30 million cut to State Wildlife Grants would greatly reduce the proactive conservation and restoration work being undertaken by States and private landowners.

Seventy-eight percent of mainland birds listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA have populations that are now stable, increasing, or have recovered enough to be delisted, according to a 2016 report published by ABC. [The Endangered Species Act: A Record of Success](#) analyzed population trends and recovery success for all U.S. listed birds, including those in the Hawaiian Islands and U.S. territories. Added ESA funding can help continue the upward trend of 41 listed U.S. bird populations and make possible their eventual recovery.

Please reverse these proposed cuts to ESA Recovery and other programs that support habitat restoration and the recovery of endangered species. Given the large number of listed birds with recovery population numbers, it makes sense to continue that trend by bolstering ESA Recovery.

## **Please Restore State of the Birds Activities for Critically Endangered Hawaiian Birds**

**We are particularly concerned about the proposed \$-2.483 million cut to State of the Birds Activities which have been dedicated to arresting the bird extinction crisis in Hawaii. Please support restoring these funds.**

More than 90 Hawaiian bird species have become extinct, and nine listed Hawaiian bird species are currently in decline. This prompted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide \$2.5 million in annual [State of the Birds Activities](#) funding since 2009, but that funding is now at risk. \$5 million per year is needed to fully fund ESA recovery funding for Hawaiian birds.

## **Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation at Risk**

Greater Sage-Grouse conservation also suffers in the proposed budget which proposes cuts to the Bureau of Land Management's Wildlife Management program. The \$14.5 million reduction, includes an \$11.5 million cut for Greater sage grouse conservation, including a revised implementation timeline of the Sagebrush Conservation Implementation Strategy and more limited habitat restoration work. Overall, the Interior Department's Sagebrush Conservation Implementation Strategy would be cut by \$22.9 million. A program reduction of \$1.5 million is also proposed for the BLM's Threatened and Endangered Species Management program.

A rider since 2014 prevents the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from taking any steps to list the sage-grouse under the ESA. In September 2015, listing the Greater Sage-Grouse was found to be not warranted for listing due to an unprecedented landscape-scale planning process that has reduced threats to sage-grouse. That plan is now at risk of being weakened under a new process initiated by

the Department of the Interior, yet this ESA rider would prevent a listing for sage grouse, even if this species slips even closer to extinction. Please restore the ESA safety net for Greater Sage-Grouse.

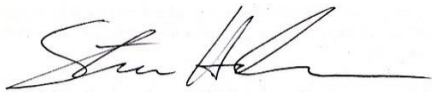
### **Please Oppose Harmful Policy Changes**

Please oppose species-specific exemptions or the inclusion of any amendments or following bills that would weaken the Endangered Species Act. [H.R. 717](#) would undermine the ESA listing process by factoring in economic considerations now only considered during the designation of critical habitat. It would also remove deadlines necessary to ensure petitions are ruled on in a timely fashion. [H.R. 1274](#) would direct the federal government to utilize state and local data in its listing decisions, regardless of whether the data is based in science, and [H.R. 3131](#) would undercut citizen enforcement of the ESA by impeding citizens' ability to obtain counsel and challenge government actions.

We are also concerned about forestry riders that would limit or eliminate opportunities for public involvement and scientific analysis in federal forest management decisions. Use of categorical exclusions for large-scale logging projects is inappropriate due to impacts to wildlife habitat, water quality, recreational access, and carbon storage.

We urge you to support conserving birds by increasing funding for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, and ESA Recovery, and opposing all harmful anti-wildlife measures and cuts to ESA recovery efforts on spending legislation for FY 2019. Thank you for considering these requests. Please contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Holmer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Steve Holmer  
Vice President of Policy  
American Bird Conservancy  
[sholmer@abcbirds.org](mailto:sholmer@abcbirds.org)  
202 888-7490