

Recovering America's Wildlife Act

(Backgrounder for April 20, 2021 West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District Board Meeting)

Purpose of the Agenda Item: Information and Possible Action

Background: The federal Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 3742) would provide states, territories, and tribes annual funds for protecting, enhancing or restoring essential habitat and implementing key conservation measures for priority fish and wildlife species as described in each state's or tribe's federally approved Wildlife Action Plan. This legislation follows the recommendation of a diverse group of conservation and industry leaders—the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish & Wildlife Resources.

Specifically, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act would:

- Provide \$1.39 billion in dedicated annual funding for proactive, collaborative efforts by the states and tribes to recover wildlife species at risk that state and tribal agencies have identified in need of conservation assistance.
- Allocate 10% of the Act's resources to recovering species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.
- Support conservation of the one-third of U.S.'s wildlife species that are at increased risk of extinction.

Of Interest to the Board – Oregon's State Wildlife Action Plan – *The Oregon Conservation Strategy* – identifies several priority "strategy" habitats of interest to the District: estuaries, grasslands and prairies, late successional mixed conifer forests, oak woodlands, riparian, and wetlands. Should the Recovering America's Wildlife Act be passed and signed into law, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) estimates that Oregon would receive upwards of \$20 million annually for implementing much needed conservation action as identified in *The Oregon Conservation Strategy*. The availability of this federal funding would also trigger the State of Oregon to raise 25% in required matching non-federal funds. This funding would provide conservation organization's such as the District the opportunity to apply for grants – most likely through the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund – for projects that implement *The Oregon Conservation Strategy*. In addition, ODFW could use Recovering America's Wildlife Act funding to establish much needed field non-game wildlife biologists – positions which have been identified as being essential to bringing back fully functional wildlife tax deferral programs such as the Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management and Riparian Lands Tax Incentive programs. The District has been working with other lower Willamette River basin soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) to build sufficient ODFW capacity to administer these wildlife tax incentive programs – including leveraging SWCD capacity -- through an Intergovernmental Agreement with ODFW and sees passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act as essential toward this end.

Action Sought from the Board: Motion to have the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District be a signatory to the *Recovering America's Wildlife Sign-On Letter* (copy attached).

Further Information – [Recovering America's Wildlife Fact Sheet](#) (National Wildlife Federation) (attached)

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Recovering America's Wildlife Sign-On Letter

Business and Conservation Interests Support Dedicated Funding to Recover America's Fish and Wildlife

We, the undersigned, support preventing fish and wildlife from becoming endangered by creating a dedicated federal fund for proactive conservation efforts, led by the states, territories, and tribal nations, to address the nation's looming wildlife crisis. We support this concept as initially recommended by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources, comprised of national business and conservation leaders.

Our nation has been blessed with a diverse array of fish and wildlife. While some of these species are thriving, many more are facing increasing challenges and are in steep decline – increasing their possibility of becoming endangered. State fish and wildlife agencies have identified 12,000 species nationwide in need of proactive conservation action.

At the request of Congress, every state has developed a State Wildlife Action Plan to assess the health of their state's fish and wildlife and outline conservation actions necessary to sustain them. Collectively, these action plans have identified these 12,000 species and formed a nationwide strategy to prevent them from becoming endangered. However, the current federal State Wildlife Grants pro-gram is funded at only a fraction of what states need to conserve these species. State fish and wild-life biologists estimate that it would cost \$1.3 billion annually to implement 75 percent of these actions. In addition, our nation's tribes need similar funds (\$97.5 million/annually) to address the more the hundreds of species and millions of acres of lands they steward. The magnitude of the solution must match the magnitude of the challenge.

America has a proud history of bringing fish and wildlife back from the brink of extinction through professional wildlife management. A century ago, prized game species like elk, wood ducks, prong-horns, and striped bass were at risk of extinction—now they are thriving due largely to user fees provided by hunters and anglers. Today we face a new conservation crisis as emerging diseases, invasive species, habitat loss, and extreme weather threaten many wildlife populations at a scale in-conceivable just a few decades ago.

This growing wildlife crisis poses a threat to America's vibrant outdoor economy. Hunters, anglers, birders, hikers, campers, and backyard wildlife watchers have created a fast growing outdoor consumer base that depends on healthy wildlife populations. Today, the outdoor economy contributes \$887 billion to our national economy annually, creates 7.6 million direct jobs, and generates \$124.5 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenue.

Further, by preventing the decline of species so that they do not require the stricter protections of the ESA, other businesses will be able to operate with more regulatory certainty and reduced risk. As the decline of numerous species and their habitats across the country worsens, preemptive action can reverse this trend and keep species from the critical, yet often costly, "emergency room" measures required by the ESA. Proactive conservation is good for wildlife, good for taxpayers, and good for business. We support the protection of our nation's precious fish and wildlife heritage by supporting efforts to direct dedicated funding into the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Pro-gram as well as a Tribal program.

The swift fox, North America's smallest wild canid, has disappeared from about 60 percent of its historic home on the Great Plains. Proactive state and federal efforts have stabilized swift fox populations across much of its remaining range, preventing the need for an Endangered Species Act listing. Photo: AdobeStock



RECOVERING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE

The bipartisan **Recovering America's Wildlife Act**, introduced by Representatives Dingell (D-MI) and Fortenberry (R-NE), will be the most significant investment in wildlife conservation in a generation. The bill will fund proactive efforts led by the states, territories and tribes to address the nation's looming wildlife crisis and to prevent species from becoming endangered.

A stitch in time. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will dedicate \$1.397 billion annually towards proactive, voluntary conservation efforts for wildlife at-risk. This will prevent species from requiring the emergency room measures of the Endangered Species Act.

Money to the states. \$1.3 billion from this bill will be spent by state fish and wildlife agencies, in partnership with state-based conservation entities. The state agencies will use the money to implement their congressionally mandated State Wildlife Action Plans. These detailed plans incorporate science and public input and are approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Tribal lands. The legislation would dedicate \$97.5 million annually for tribal wildlife conservation

efforts. The First Nations own or have influence on tens of millions of acres of land.

Nationwide problem. The state wildlife agencies have identified more than 12,000 species in need of conservation attention.

Need for funding. Federal funding is less than five percent of what is necessary to conserve these species. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act is a innovative solution that matches the magnitude of the problem.

Helping wildlife at risk. The money will be used for on-the-ground conservation efforts such as conserving and restoring habitats, fighting invasive species, reintroducing native species and tackling emerging diseases.

GOOD FOR WILDLIFE, GOOD FOR TAXPAYERS, GOOD FOR BUSINESS.

Cost effective. Once a species reaches the point of needing the protection of the Endangered Species Act, recovery becomes significantly more uncertain, more difficult and more expensive. Proactive efforts taken earlier in a species' decline are better for wildlife, cost less money and are less likely to be controversial.

An economic boost. Americans spend \$140 billion dollars on wildlife-focused recreation every year. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will result in more recreational opportunities for all Americans, as a portion of the funds can be used for increasing public access to the great outdoors.

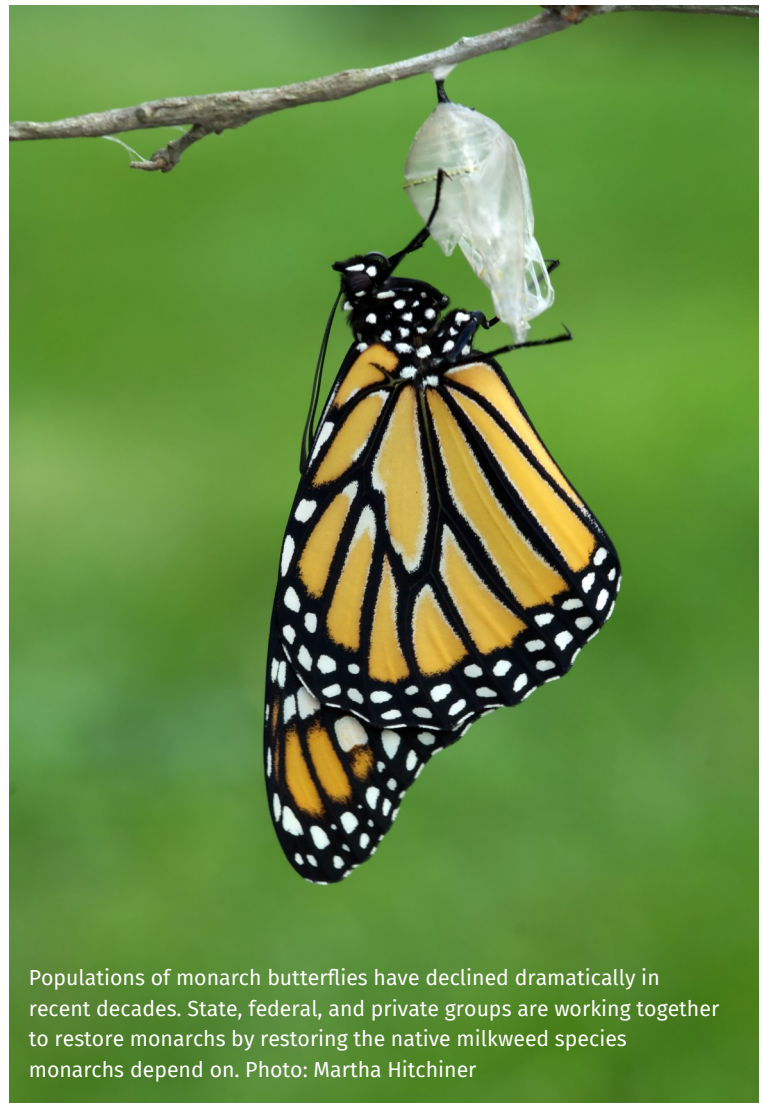
Benefits people and wildlife. Diverse fish and wildlife and their habitats provide important contributions like clean water and air, flood prevention, pollination and carbon capture.

LOCAL DECISIONS, LOCAL BENEFITS

Connecting people with nature. A small portion of the funds will go wildlife education efforts and creating opportunities to view wildlife.

A history of success. State fish and wildlife agencies have had great success in restoring other species that were once on the brink – like bald eagles, peregrine falcons, white-tailed deer, turkey, elk, striped bass and more. These are all examples of fish and wildlife that now have healthy and thriving numbers thanks to dedicated funding for increased conservation efforts.

Better for hunters and anglers. Currently, 80 percent of the funding for our state wildlife agencies comes from state hunting and fishing licenses and permits as well as federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing gear. This funding model has worked for decades but is no longer enough on its own.



Populations of monarch butterflies have declined dramatically in recent decades. State, federal, and private groups are working together to restore monarchs by restoring the native milkweed species monarchs depend on. Photo: Martha Hitchiner

WILDLIFE IN CRISIS: WORLDWIDE AND HERE AT HOME

America's wildlife at risk. A 2018 report from the National Wildlife Federation, the American Fisheries Society, and The Wildlife Society estimated that one-third of all fish and wildlife species in the United States are at an increased risk of extinction.

Worldwide extinctions. A new scientific report from IPBES estimates that, worldwide, one million plant and animal species could be headed towards extinction in the coming decades, more than at any other period in human history.



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