

September 13, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: Meeting the Challenges of the Biodiversity and Extinction Crisis Over the Next 50 Years

Dear Mr. President:

The Endangered Species Act is one of the most successful conservation laws ever enacted by any nation. It has prevented the extinction of the overwhelming majority of wildlife and plant species under its protection. As our country, the Departments of the Interior and Commerce, and our organizations all commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Act and its extraordinary achievements, we must recognize that our planet faces an existential crisis with more and more species facing extinction in the coming decades.

Thus, as we reflect and celebrate the Endangered Species Act's achievements, we ask that you initiate bold action that mobilizes the entirety of the federal government to stem the loss of biodiversity and halt the global extinction crisis. Importantly, this includes consulting with Tribal governments and honoring federal trust obligations to Tribal communities, which has too often been overlooked and under prioritized. To truly be a success, a whole-of-government approach must also recognize and incorporate indigenous knowledge and practices to support conservation and biodiversity, safeguard the rights and needs of indigenous peoples, and ensure social equity and justice in decision-making.

The unraveling of the natural world remains a fundamental threat to the well-being of all humanity, which depends on millions of species and the countless services that the web of life provides. Each extinction brings closer the collapse of these planetary life-support systems, including carbon sequestration, pollination, water purification, oxygen production and disease regulation. To regain the United States' position as a global leader in conservation and prevent mass extinctions, we all must take swift action that matches the extent and scale of the problem. Accordingly, we ask you to take the following bold actions so that national policies to prevent extinction, recover species, and address the biodiversity crisis are even more successful during the next 50 years than they have been in the previous 50 years.

1. Implement Whole of Government Approaches to Saving Biodiversity and Endangered Species

A national biodiversity strategy is needed to articulate the nation's commitment to stemming the biodiversity and extinction crises at home and abroad. The strategy would serve as a blueprint for a whole-of-government response to tackling species extinction and addressing the primary threats to biodiversity, ecosystem services and ultimately, humanity. The strategy should address the five drivers of biodiversity loss — habitat degradation and fragmentation, climate change, wildlife exploitation, invasive species, and pollution; secure and restore critical ecosystem services; and reestablish the nation as a global leader in biodiversity conservation.

This approach would mobilize a stronger, more coordinated national response to the existential challenge we are facing. The strategy would direct federal agencies to pursue actions within existing laws and policies and promote innovation for developing new tools to protect biodiversity. It would also provide governments, corporations, and non-profits with a roadmap for actions needed to address the crisis' major drivers.

2. Boost Recovery of Endangered Species Through Robust Funding and Engaging Agencies Across Government

The Endangered Species Act has been fiscally starved for decades and, as a result, has been severely compromised from realizing its full potential. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service currently receives less than half of the funding required to fully implement the Act's mandate to recover listed species. The Department of the Interior should support, and the Congress should fund, an increase to well over \$800 million for the Service's endangered species conservation. Significant increases also should be provided for the National Marine Fisheries Service Protected Resources Science and Management program.

In addition, the Endangered Species Act contains a long-neglected requirement found in Section 7(a)(1) that requires all federal agencies to prioritize the conservation and recovery of endangered species. Unfortunately, most federal agencies have not fully embraced their obligation, and some have patently ignored their obligation to conserve listed animals and plants. Thus, the Departments of the Interior and Commerce should:

- Direct all federal agencies — in consultation with Tribal and Indigenous communities — to finalize proactive conservation programs that advance the conservation of endangered species and help to restore declining wildlife and plants.
- Direct the Secretary of the Interior, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Secretary of Commerce, through the National Marine Fisheries Service, to establish minimum requirements for what a conservation program shall include. The goal and guiding principle of any such program must ultimately be the proactive, landscape-level conservation and recovery of the species.

3. Adopt an Ambitious Ecosystem-based Framework to Recover Endangered Species and Rebuild America's Wildlife Populations

Globally, one million animal and plant species face extinction within the coming decades and millions more are declining as habitat loss, climate change, wildlife exploitation, pollution, and other human activities continue to threaten their survival. In North America alone, we have lost nearly three billion birds since 1970.¹ During that same time frame, global wildlife populations have declined by an average of 69%.² Here in the United States, nearly half of all ecosystems are at risk of range-wide collapse.³

¹ Rosenberg, L. V. et al. *Decline of the North American avifauna*. Science (2019).

² WWF (2022) *Living Planet Report 2022 – Building a nature positive society*. Almond, R.E.A., Grooten, M., Juffe Bignoli, D. & Petersen, T. (Eds). WWF, Gland, Switzerland.

³ NatureServe, *Biodiversity in Focus: United States Edition* (2023).

Conserving threatened and endangered species is not limited to merely preventing their extinction. Under the Endangered Species Act, the conservation of listed species encompasses the much more ambitious goal of recovering them “the point at which the measures provided pursuant to this Act are no longer required.”⁴ Yet despite the paramount importance of recovery in the Endangered Species Act, the concept of what “recovery” means remains poorly defined. In addition, recovery criteria are often inconsistently applied across species and lack a clear biological rationale. The current approach too often focuses exclusively on biological extinction risk to gauge recovery and fails to consider the important roles myriad species play in the ecosystems they live in. For example, when a keystone species disappears, the entire ecosystem is disrupted, causing cascading changes that can have harmful, far-ranging consequences.

Thus, confronting the widespread loss of biodiversity will require the Biden administration to implement a more ambitious, ecosystem-based framework that not only repairs what has been harmed but rebuilds populations of wildlife and plant species so that our natural heritage can be preserved for generations and centuries to come. Perhaps the best example of what recovery should look like is the Bald Eagle, which achieved healthy and increasing populations in nearly all 50 states and is now a meaningful part of a diverse spectrum of habitats and ecosystems.

Therefore, we urge the Biden administration to rapidly adopt a more holistic approach to recovery that considers not only minimum viable populations, but also a species’ role in the ecosystems it inhabits, as the Act originally envisioned. In doing so, the administration should prioritize the protection of key areas that will increase ecosystem resiliency and preserve biodiversity hotspots in the United States, the habitat of critically endangered species, and the diversity of habitats found across the nation.

Combating the global wildlife extinction crisis, stemming the loss of biodiversity, and restoring our natural heritage will require the Biden administration to be bolder and more visionary than any other administration in history. There is no time to waste. The actions we take today will affect whether future generations live in a world where Polar Bears and Monarch Butterflies still exist, or one where they can only be found in zoos. Thus, we urge the Biden administration to take these bold steps to ensure that the Endangered Species Act and much-needed, new initiatives to conserve biodiversity continue to save and restore the natural world around us for another 50 years and beyond.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
Defenders of Wildlife
Endangered Species Coalition
2020 Action
7th Generation Advisors
Advocates for Snake Preservation
Alameda Creek Alliance
Alaska Wilderness League
American Bird Conservancy

⁴ 16 U.S.C. 1532(3). *See also, Gifford Pinchot Task Force v. U.S. Fish & Wildlife*, 378 F. 3d 1059 (9th Cir. 2004).

American Indian Mothers
Animal Defenders International
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Protection League of New Jersey
Animal Protection New Mexico
Animal Welfare Institute
Animals Are Sentient Beings
Animas Valley Institute
Apex Protection Project
Appalachian Mountain Advocates
Appalachian Voices
Attorneys for Animals
Audubon Society of Central Arkansas
Basin and Range Watch
Bat Conservation International
Beyond Pesticides
Bird Conservation Network
Bold Visions Conservation
Boulder Rights of Nature
Buffalo Field Campaign
California Native Plant Society
California Wildlife Foundation
Californians for Western Wilderness
Carnivore Coexistence Lab
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Food Safety
Christian Council of Delmarva
Christians Caring for Creation
Ciudadanos del Karso
Clean Water Action
Coal River Mountain Watch
Colorado Native Plant Society
Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center
ColoradoWild
Conservancy of Southwest Florida
Conservation Alabama
Conservation Connection Foundation
Conservation Law Foundation
Consolidated Oregon Indivisible Network (COIN)
Coosa River Basin Initiative
Coosa Riverkeeper
Copper Canyon Alliance
CORALations
Coyote Watch Canada
Deer Creek Valley Natural Resources Conservation Association
Defiance Canyon Raptor Rescue and Battle Creek Alliance

Desert Tortoise Council
Dogwood Alliance
Down to Earth Apiaries
Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance
Earth Day Initiative
Earth Ministry/Washington Interfaith Power and Light
EarthAction
Earthjustice
EarthPath Sanctuary
Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research
EcoFlight
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental Action
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin
Environmental Investigation Agency
Environmental Center of San Diego
Environmental Law & Policy Center
Environmental Protection Information Center
Farmer Frog
Fisheries Conservation Foundation
Florida Turtle Conservation Trust
Florida Wildlife Federation
Footloose Montana
Forest Keeper
Forest Web
Foundation Earth
Four Paws USA
Friends of Big Ivy
Friends of Blackwater
Friends of the Bitterroot
Friends of the Earth
Friends of the Inyo
Friends of the San Juans
Georgia Audubon
Georgia Conservancy
Georgia Interfaith Power and Light
Glen Canyon Institute
Glynn Environmental Coalition
Grand Canyon Trust
Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project
Grand Junction Area Broadband - Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Greenpeace USA
Great Lakes Wildlife Alliance
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
GreenFaith
GreenLatinos

Healthy Ocean Coalition
Heartwood
Helena Hunters and Anglers Association
High Country Conservation Advocates
Howling For Wolves
Humane Action Pittsburgh
I Heart Pisgah
Illinois Environmental Council
In Defense of Animals
Information Network for Responsible Mining
Interfaith Power & Light
Interfaith Vegan Coalition
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
International Wildlife Coexistence Network
Intheshadowofthewolf
Jemez Peacemakers
Juniata Valley Audubon Society
Justice for Wolves
JUJustice Washington, UU State Action Network
Kentucky Heartwood
Kentucky Link Coalition
Kentucky Waterways Alliance
Kettle Range Conservation Group
Kickapoo Peace Circle
Klamath Forest Alliance
Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
KyotoUSA
La Purisima Audubon Society
Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care
Large Carnivore Fund
Lassen Forest Preservation Group
League of Conservation Voters
League of Humane Voters of New Jersey
League of Humane Voters Wisconsin
Living Rivers & Colorado Riverkeeper
Living with Wolves
Los Angeles Audubon Society
Los Padres ForestWatch
Madrean Archipelago Wildlife Center
Maine Friends of Animals
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
ManaSota-88
Miami Waterkeeper
Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund
Montana Environmental Information Center
Monterey Bay Aquarium

National Aquarium
National Ocean Protection Coalition
National Wildlife Refuge Association
National Wolfwatcher Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
NC WARN
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nevada Wildlife Alliance
New Hampshire Wildlife Coalition
New Mexico Audubon Council
New Mexico Wild
North American Butterfly Association
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness
Northern California Council, Fly Fishers International
Northwest Environmental Defense Center
Nuclear Energy Information Service (NEIS)
NY4WHALES
NYC Plover Project
Ocean Alliance
Ocean Conservation Research
Ocean Defense Initiative
Oceana
Oceanic Preservation Society
Ohio Animal Advocates
One More Generation
OneNature
Orca Network
Oregon Wild
Partnership for Policy Integrity
Pelican Island Audubon Society
Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology
People & Pollinators Action Network
People for Protecting Peace River
Plan B to Save Wolves
Plant Based Treaty
Portland Audubon
Portneuf Resource Council
Prairie Protection Colorado
Predator Defense
Project Coyote
Public Citizen
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility
Public Lands Project
Puget Soundkeeper
Raptors Are The Solution

Resource Renewal Institute
RESTORE: The North Woods
Rock Creek Alliance
Rocky Mountain Wild
San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society
San Francisco Baykeeper
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
Sage Steppe Wild
Save Animals Facing Extinction
Save Our Allegheny Ridges
Save Our Cabinets
Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Save The Colorado
SAVE THE FROGS!
Save the Manatee Club
Save the Pine Bush
Seattle Aquarium
Selkirk Conservation Alliance
Sequoia ForestKeeper
Sheep Mountain Alliance
Shoals Environmental Alliance
Sierra Club
Sierra Forest Legacy
Sierra Foothills Audubon Society
Silvix Resources
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Western Province Leadership
Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia
Social Compassion in Legislation
Social Justice Commission (Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts)
Sound Action
South Carolina Aquarium
South Florida Wildlands Association
Southern Environmental Law Center
Southern Oregon Climate Action Now
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Speak for Wolves
Stillwaters Environmental Center
Surfrider Foundation
Sustainable Arizona
Tennessee Riverkeeper
Texas Humane Legislation Network
The 06 Legacy
The Coalition for Conservation Genetics
The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
The Cougar Fund

The Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association
The #RelistWolves Campaign
The Safina Center
The Society of Conservation Biology North America
The Urban Wildlands Group
Tropical Audubon Society
Trap Free Montana
Trap Free Montana Public Lands
Tuolumne River Trust
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Upper Etowah River Alliance
Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition
Urban Bee San Francisco
Ventana Wilderness Alliance
Vets for Peace
Voices of Wildlife in NH
Watershed Alliance of Marin
WaterWatch of Oregon
Web of Life Products
Western Environmental Law Center
Western Watersheds Project
Western Wildlife Conservancy
Western Wildlife Outreach
Whidbey Environmental Action Network
Wild Orca
Wild Nature Institute
WildEarth Guardians
Wilderness Southeast
Wilderness Watch
Wilderness Workshop
Wildlife Conservation Society
Wildlife for All
Winter Wildlands Alliance
Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation
Wolf Conservation Center
Wolf Education and Research Center
Wolves of the Rockies
Wyoming Coalition for Animal Protection
Wyoming Wildlife Advocates
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
Yaak Valley Forest Council
Zero Hour
Zoo New England: Franklin Park Zoo & Stone Zoo