Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 18, 2008

The Honorable Norman Dicks
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Todd Tiarht
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Dicks and Ranking Member Tiahrt:

As members who share your commitment to the conservation of our nation's wildlife, fish, plants and their habitats, we are writing to urge needed increases for the US Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) endangered species program in the FY2009 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

When Congress passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973, it recognized that America has an obligation to protect its most vulnerable species of wildlife, fish and plants and to ensure a rich conservation legacy for our children and grandchildren. Unfortunately, we are falling short of that commitment by failing to provide needed funding to protect and adequately recover endangered and threatened plants and animals. The Administration's Fiscal Year 2009 Budget includes a $3.7 million or 2.5 percent cut to the endangered species program, further exacerbating the existing shortfall. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is in crisis and has lost 600 staff in recent years.

Failure to provide adequate levels of funding for endangered species operations will only ensure that species slide closer to extinction, decreasing chances for recovery while increasing the costs. The program is currently experiencing at least a 30 percent staffing shortage due to budget constraints, an unacceptable vacancy rate. The number of candidate species awaiting protection under the Act, many of which have been candidates for years, totals 280. The number of projects reviewed under the consultation program has increased dramatically, from 40,000 in 1999 to more than 67,000 in 2006. Development and implementation of Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs), which allow activities to proceed while still protecting species, continues to grow, with funding critically needed to help ensure timely and effective development and monitoring of 500 existing and more than 350 new HCPs that together will cover more than 70 million acres

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when complete.

While we understand the existing budget constraints placed on the Subcommittee, we urge you make every effort to provide an increase of at least $38.4 million over the President's budget request for USFWS endangered species operating accounts to a total of $185.2 million, with the increases allocated as follows: $7 million for Listing, $16.4 million for Recovery, $11.6 million for Consultation, and $3.3 million for Candidate Conservation.

In addition, the President's budget request of $75.5 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund continues to decrease funding for this successful cooperative program with the states from its historic high of $104 million in FY2001. We further ask for the Subcommittee to consider an increase for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund to a level of $96.2 million, while also taking into consideration the demand for this program is two to three times this level, and some states are supporting a request of $125 million for this critical program this budget cycle.

Thank you for your kind consideration of these requests. We look forward to working with you as the FY2009 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill moves forward in the House in the weeks ahead.

Sincerely,

Jim Oberstar

Nick Rahall

George Miller

Howard L. Berman

Wayne T. Gilchrest

Jim Oberstar

Ron Kind

Barney Frank

Earl Blumenauer

Jim Saxton

J R Butterfield Jr.

Wm. Lacy Clay

Hal Shelton

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Jim McDermott

Lois Capps

Mazie K. Hirono

Betty Sutton

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Mike Ross

Dana DeGette

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Steve Cohen

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Tom Allen

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Sam Farr

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