**Born Free USA \* Center for Biological Diversity \* Defenders of Wildlife \* Howling for Wolves \* International Fund for Animal Welfare \* Sierra Club**

April XX, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran

Chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations

113 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations

437 Russell Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen

Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations

2306 Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey

Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations

2365 Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Frelinghuysen and Ranking Members Leahy and Lowey:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters nationwide, we are writing to urge you to reject all policy riders on Fiscal Year 17 appropriations legislation that would erode the protections of the Endangered Species Act and other safeguards for wildlife, and ensure that conservation actions undertaken by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service are adequately funded. Damaging provisions that undermine the Endangered Species Act were included in both the House and Senate versions of the FY 17 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bills from last year (H.R. 5538/S. 3068). If enacted, any one of these riders would be highly detrimental to the future of imperiled species conservation. We also strongly oppose all other anti-environmental riders that would undermine protections for our land, wildlife, water, and air. Additionally, we urge you to maintain funding for conservation programs under the Endangered Species Act at no less than FY 16 levels.

The Endangered Species Act remains the most effective and important law to protect species at risk of extinction. This visionary law has served as a model for other conservation laws across the globe. Thanks to the Endangered Species Act, the United States has successfully conserved numerous iconic American species that make up our important natural heritage. 99 percent of the species placed under the Endangered Species Act’s protections are still with us today, including the bald eagle, the whooping crane, and the Southern sea otter. It is also a wildly popular conservation law. According to a June 2015 poll, 90 percent of American voters support the Endangered Species Act.[[1]](#footnote-1) Another poll from December 2016 found that 81 percent of American voters agree that saving at-risk wildlife from going extinct is an important goal for the federal government.[[2]](#footnote-2)

None of the Endangered Species Act riders that were included in the FY 17 Interior appropriations bills would advance the goal of saving at-risk wildlife from extinction. In fact, each one would stymie efforts to conserve and recover imperiled species. We are deeply concerned by no fewer than eleven provisions included in one or both bills that would undermine the ESA, including riders that would strip federal protections for iconic American wildlife including the gray wolf, the Mexican gray wolf, the lesser prairie-chicken, and two species of meadow jumping mice. Another rider would block implementation of landmark land management plans to conserve the greater sage-grouse after years of collaboration among local, state and federal partners. Yet another provision would override protections for salmon and other endangered fish in California’s Bay-Delta estuary. Decisions about whether imperiled species still need important conservation measures provided under the Endangered Species Act should be based on the best available science, rather than political considerations that fall outside of the Act’s framework. We urge you not to include these riders in the conferenced bill, and to allow the Endangered Species Act to do its work.

We are also concerned about the steady decline in congressional appropriations for conservation measures under the Endangered Species Act we’ve witnessed over the years. The agencies that implement the Endangered Species Act desperately need more funding to develop species recovery plans and implement species recovery actions. Over 400 U.S. listed species do not currently have recovery plans. Additionally, inadequate funding for the ESA permitting program has resulted in delays for American businesses and landowners seeking to carry out activities ranging from road construction to bridge repairs to housing development and other land use activity. Funding for both permitting and recovery has failed to keep pace with newly listed species. The agencies also need adequate funding to evaluate whether declining species should be listed and to take steps – in partnership with states and other stakeholders – to conserve them while they await decisions.

As you finish the important work to fund the federal government through the end of this fiscal year, we urge you to fully fund the federal agencies that implement important conservation and recovery actions under the Endangered Species Act, and to exclude the detrimental policy riders discussed above.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

1. Tulchin Research, *Poll Finds Overwhelming, Broad-Based Support for the Endangered Species Act Among Voters Nationwide,* July 2015, <http://www.defenders.org/publications/Defenders-of-Wildlife-National-ESA-Survey.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hart Research, *CAP Energy/Environment/Climate Voters Survey,* Dec. 2016, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2017/01/18040011/FI-CAP-Energy-Enviro-Dec2016.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)