

March 9, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol H-307
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Granger,

Monarch butterflies, once one of the most common and beloved butterflies in the United States, are on the verge of disappearing forever. In the past two decades, monarch populations have plummeted more than 80%, dramatically increasing the likelihood of extinction. Without emergency help from Congress, it's almost certain that the western population of monarch butterflies, which famously winters on the California coast each year, will collapse within a few years. That population has crashed by 99.9%, and less than 2,000 monarchs were recorded overwintering in coastal California this year – the lowest number ever recorded, down from 30,000 last year and 1.2 million a few decades ago.

For the eastern population of monarchs – which overwinters in Mexico – the population has fallen by 85% since the mid-1990s. The latest annual count, released at the end of February, showed a decline of 26% from last year's count. There is now up to an 80% chance they will collapse within 50 years. Once the migrations collapse, monarchs are on a sure path towards extinction. The situation is now dire and urgent help is desperately needed. Thus, we request that you significantly increase funding for the conservation of monarch butterflies to \$100 million per year starting in fiscal year 2022. This level of funding would cover the cost of restoring one million acres of milkweed and pollinator habitat per year so that the butterfly is resilient to threats from habitat loss, pesticides, severe weather, and climate change.¹

Monarchs have been decreasing towards extinction due to landscape-scale threats from pesticides, development, and global climate change. Although illegal logging and severe weather have contributed to the decline, the large-scale use of herbicides that destroy milkweed—the monarch caterpillar's sole host plant and only food source during its caterpillar stage—is a driver of the butterfly's decline. Since the 1990s monarchs have lost about 167 million acres of summer breeding habitat to agricultural intensification and suburban sprawl. Milkweed has been nearly eradicated from areas of the Midwest where monarchs are typically born, and scientists estimate that billions of milkweed plants have been

¹ According to Monarch Watch, the costs of restoration and maintenance of milkweeds and nectar plants ranges from \$100-\$1000 per acre.

wiped out due to increased herbicide use. Reversing that trend by actively restoring milkweed and other pollinator habitat is critical to ensure the long-term survival of the monarch butterfly.

In addition to direct loss of milkweed and nectar flowers, monarchs are threatened by neonicotinoids and other systemic insecticides and a variety of agents used in agriculture, parks, yards, and commercial properties. Monarchs can be directly killed by exposure to insecticides used to treat pests such as moths, grasshoppers, and mosquitos.

Adding insult to injury, the climate crisis is undermining the stable weather conditions and predictable flowering seasons that monarchs need to complete their migration. Climate change also threatens these butterflies' overwintering habitat in the mountain forests of Mexico. It is now expected that the International Monarch Biosphere Reserve in Mexico is expected to become climatically unsuitable for monarchs by the end of the century.

While the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has taken some initial steps toward slowing the monarch's decline—including the implementation of the Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project—monarchs desperately need more funding and an even greater commitment from Congress to ensure their long-term survival.

The 2015 *National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators* set a short-term goal of 225 million butterflies at the overwintering locations in Mexico occupying an area of 15 acres (6 hectares). This is the bare minimum needed to avoid extinction and is not a long-term goal for stability. Unfortunately, the latest annual count for 2020 found overwintering monarchs occupying just 7 acres (2.83 hectares). Funding this strategy will require a substantial increase in resources to not only stem the rapid decline of monarchs but to get them on a path towards recovery.

* * *

The world is in the midst of a staggering wildlife extinction crisis unlike anything humans have ever experienced before and on a scale and pace unseen in millions of years. Wildlife populations around the world are crashing at alarming rates and with distressing frequency. One million species are heading towards extinction. Millions more are declining.

Scientists warn of an insect apocalypse as populations of once-common pollinators and other insects plummet around the world. Monarch butterflies once numbered in the billions and covered 10 hectares of overwintering forest. Countless generations celebrated their spectacular beauty and epic, life-affirming migrations. Dedicating \$100 million a year to monarch conservation gives these beloved butterflies a fighting chance at survival.

We sincerely hope Congress will step up to the challenge and help save one of the world's most iconic butterflies from further decline.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
350NJ-Rockland

7th Generation Advisors
Alaska's Big Village Network
All-Creatures.org
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Welfare Institute
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.
Animas Valley Institute
Audubon Society of Central Arkansas
California Oaks
California Wildlife Foundation
Californians for Western Wilderness
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Large Landscape Conservation
Christian Council of Delmarva
Conservation Congress
Conservation Council For Hawaii
Conservation Northwest
Earth Path Sanctuary
Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research
Eco-Eating
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Center of San Diego
Footloose Montana
Friends of Animals
Friends of Blackwater, Inc.
Fund for Wild Nature
GARDEN, Inc.
Greater Hells Canyon Council
Greenpeace
Heartwood
In Defense of Animals
In the Shadow of the Wolf
inNative
InterFaith Council
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Jayhawk Audubon Society
Juniata Valley Audubon Society
Kettle Range Conservation Group
Kickapoo Peace Circle
Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
KyotoUSA
Los Padres ForestWatch
Louisiana Audubon Council
Madison Audubon
Maryland Ornithological Society

Mass Audubon
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
National Wolfwatcher Coalition
New Yorkers for Clean Power
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems
Northern Jaguar Project
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
Northwest Environmental Advocates
NY4WHALES
Oceanic Preservation Society
Pelican Island Audubon
Predator Defense
Project Eleven Hundred
Public Lands Project
Raptors Are The Solution
RESTORE: The North Woods
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Save The Colorado
Save the Pine Bush
Sequoia ForestKeeper®
Social Compassion in Legislation
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
The Ecology Center
The Lands Council
The Safina Center
Toxic Free NC
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Upstate Forever
Ventana Wilderness Alliance
Wasatch Clean Air Coalition.
Watershed Management Group
Xun Biosphere Project