

# United States Senate

May 8, 2024

The Honorable Jeffrey A. Merkley  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
531 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

We thank you for your continued support of programs at the Department of the Interior (DOI) that support U.S. efforts to conserve wildlife, combat wildlife trafficking and illegal timber trade, and protect against the spillover and spread of diseases of zoonotic origin. As you draft the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, we ask that you include \$30 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF) and \$31 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) International Affairs (IA) program. We also ask that you meet the President's request for \$110.8 million for the FWS Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) to maintain and expand upon the funding levels supported by the Subcommittee in recent years.

The MSCF is made up of a group of five Congressionally-established funds that provide seed money for public-private partnerships to protect the world's most iconic and imperiled species — tigers, African and Asian elephants, rhinos, great apes, turtles, and tortoises—in their native habitats. While the MSCF supports specific groups of species, the USFWS IA program supports broader efforts to conserve our planet's rich wildlife diversity by building capacity for landscape-level wildlife conservation and working to prevent the illegal wildlife trade. The program also conducts oversight of domestic laws and international treaties that promote conservation of plant and animal species by ensuring that international trade and other activities do not threaten their survival in the wild.

USFWS OLE is the key agency at the Department of the Interior responsible for enforcing U.S. laws related to wildlife. It investigates wildlife crimes, inspects wildlife and wildlife products at the border and ports-of-entry, regulates wildlife trade domestically, and works in partnership with international, state, and tribal counterparts to conserve wildlife resources. It plays an integral role in the ongoing efforts to address the global crisis of wildlife poaching and trafficking as well as in preventing illegal timber imports into the U.S. Increasing funding for OLE will support efforts to maximize the scope and effectiveness of USFWS' response to the international wildlife trafficking crisis, ensuring OLE has an adequate number of law enforcement agents deployed to enforce laws against wildlife trafficking in the U.S., as well as supporting the Office's ability to address the increasing problem of online wildlife trafficking.

OLE is also responsible for wildlife inspections and related law enforcement on the U.S. border, an issue that has been brought to the fore over the last few years as the world has felt the human and economic toll of a pandemic sparked by COVID-19, a disease with zoonotic origin.

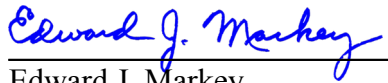
We are grateful for the Committee's strong, bipartisan support for these programs. We believe additional funding is needed, particularly in light of three major challenges that are intertwined: the rapid decline of wildlife and biodiversity on a global scale, with as many as a million species at risk of extinction by the end of this century; the ongoing fallout from a global pandemic, which has claimed millions of lives and cost the U.S. economy trillions of dollars; and the worsening impacts of climate change, which threaten to undermine communities and ecosystems as well as our national security.

Investments in global conservation and wildlife law enforcement, including the work supported by these USFWS programs, directly address root causes of all three of these challenges by promoting conservation and restoration of wildlife habitats, improving wildlife health monitoring and zoonotic disease risk management, preventing wildlife trafficking, and securing the U.S. border against the illegal entry of wildlife and wildlife products. Moreover, these programs have built trust in and goodwill for the United States in the countries where these projects take place, often under challenging conditions. Given both the growing needs and return on investment that these programs provide, we are asking for an increase in funding for the programs for FY25.

Appropriations packages over the past four fiscal years have also included report language directing the Department of the Interior to implement policies and procedures for the execution and oversight of international conservation programs. This ensures that grant recipients have policies in place that safeguard the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the human rights of individuals and communities in and around protected areas supported by grant monies. We support retaining these safeguards and urge the Committee to include sufficient funding to support their implementation.

The MSCF, the USFWS IA program, and the USFWS OLE have enjoyed longstanding bipartisan support in Congress and enthusiastic interest among our constituents, many of whom place a high value on the protection of iconic wildlife species, especially in concert with the promotion of the rights of local and Indigenous communities. With nature and biodiversity declining globally and with multiple negative spillover effects for human health, development, and the climate, support for these programs is needed now more than ever. For these reasons, we ask that you support funding the MSCF at \$30 million, USFWS IA at \$31 million, and USFWS OLE at \$110.8 million in the FY25 Interior, the Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Thank you for taking the time to consider our views and for recognizing the ongoing importance of these programs in protecting our world's rich biological diversity and the people and communities who rely on it.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator




Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



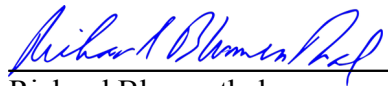
Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



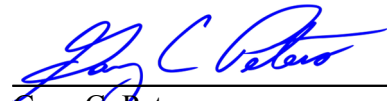
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



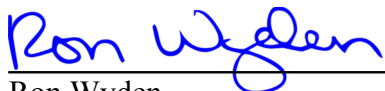
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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



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Peter Welch  
United States Senator



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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



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Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator