

RECOVERING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE

Bipartisan legislation would benefit wildlife, people

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will help safeguard habitats and biodiversity, slow extinction rates and secure a brighter future for people and nature.



Whooping cranes. © Matt Williams

Over a third of America's fish and wildlife species are at risk of extinction. Just one part of a disturbing global biodiversity loss, the drivers include habitat loss, invasive species, disease and the impacts of a shifting climate.

More than 1,600 species are already listed under the Endangered Species Act, another 150 are presumed extinct, and state fish and wildlife agencies have identified more than 12,000 that need conservation help now. The loss of this biodiversity is not just a threat to the species themselves; it is a threat to communities and the economies that depend on them. Americans spend \$140 billion dollars on wildlife-focused recreation alone every year.

With the COVID-19 pandemic already taking a toll on economies and livelihoods across the country, the continued loss of wildlife will only exacerbate these impacts.

STATES' SUCCESSFUL LEGACY ON RECOVERING SPECIES

State wildlife agencies are in a unique position to help avert this trend and protect America's biodiversity.

Every 10 years, state wildlife agencies collaboratively assess how wildlife in their respective states are doing. They then make lists of species that are in decline and in need of proactive conservation attention.

We know that conservation works. Together with partners, state fish and wildlife agencies have had great success restoring other species that were once on the brink, including bald eagles, peregrine falcons, white-tailed deer, turkey, elk, striped bass and more.

These are all examples of fish and wildlife that now have healthy and thriving populations thanks to dedicated funding for increased conservation efforts.

Currently, 80 percent of the funding for state wildlife agencies comes from state hunting and fishing licenses and permits as well as federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing gear.

While this funding model has worked for decades, the accelerating loss of biodiversity requires a new approach and more investment.



A male Florida panther from Babcock Ranch State Preserve, part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor interior to Fort Myers. There are an estimated 200 panthers left in the wild. © Carlton Ward Jr.

A HISTORIC AND NECESSARY INVESTMENT IN CONSERVATION

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 2773 and S. 2372), or RAWA, will be the most significant investment in wildlife conservation in decades.

The \$1.397 billion bill will fund local and state efforts to help wildlife at risk and to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered. It also will also help recover species that are already endangered.

The money will be used for on-the-ground conservation efforts such as conserving and restoring habitats, fighting invasive species, reintroducing native species and tackling emerging diseases.

Approximately \$1.3 billion from this bill will be spent by state fish and wildlife agencies, in partnership with state-based conservation entities.

The state agencies will use the money to implement their congressionally mandated State Wildlife Action Plans. These detailed plans incorporate science and public input and are approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The remaining \$97.5 million will go toward Tribal wildlife conservation efforts.

LOCAL DECISIONS, LOCAL BENEFITS

Taking action when species are just starting to decline rather than waiting until they are threatened with imminent extinction is a smart investment.

If a species is in such bad shape that it qualifies for the "emergency room" measures of the Endangered Species Act, it is much more difficult – and more expensive – to recover the species.

Saving wildlife is an investment in a clean, sustainable and thriving economy for rural and urban communities alike.

Efforts to recover a fish species by restoring a wetland, for example, not only benefits that species but can improve local water quality, protect that community from flooding and create jobs.

Overall, the bill could generate as many as 33,600 direct jobs every year in fields ranging from construction to forestry, as well as boost the country's outdoor recreation economy.

This is a strategy that is good for wildlife, good for people and good for business.



Staff from the Nature Conservancy and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife, tour the Big Rivers Corridor Phase II project located at the confluence of the Ohio and Tradewater Rivers in Crittenden County, Kentucky. The project will protect 4,285 acres providing watershed and water quality protection as well as guarding endangered, threatened and rare species recovery. © Mark Godfrey/TNC

► **Contact:** Brent Keith | The Nature Conservancy | brent.keith@tnc.org or (503) 507-0550