



THE STATE OF ARIZONA  
**GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT**

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July 21, 2011

The Honorable Jeff Flake  
United States House of Representatives  
240 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Flake:

The Arizona Game and Fish Department is writing you with great urgency to express our concerns over the drastic wildlife conservation funding cuts contained in the Interior & Environment spending bill for Fiscal Year 2012.

The disproportionate cuts to these vital programs strike directly at America's longstanding tradition of federal support for state conservation and management of fish, wildlife and their habitat. The cuts would not only negatively impact wildlife conservation in Arizona, but would have the effect of bolstering recent alarming trends to federalize wildlife conservation while marginalizing the historically critical role of the states' conservation efforts.

Specifically, the cuts in the spending bill would have dramatic negative effects on these programs:

- **State Wildlife Grants (SWG).** This program would be hit with a 64 percent funding reduction compared to FY 2011 (\$22 million vs. \$61.9 million) and a 75 percent reduction compared to the \$90 million funded in FY 2010.

The SWG program was created by Congress in 2000 to assist states with their voluntary and proactive efforts to protect the more than 12,000 at-risk wildlife species around the U.S. from becoming endangered. SWG is the principal source of funding for implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans (Arizona's plan was developed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders and conservation partners). The program has received strong bipartisan support for more than a decade and leverages tens of millions of dollars from state and private sources every year.

In Arizona, SWG dollars are matched with state Heritage funds, and combined, they make it possible to monitor and manage at-risk wildlife populations, manage and restore critical habitats, and prevent further decline of species. These funds enable Arizona to be proactive, not reactive, placing conservation measures on the ground to manage species and preclude the need for their federal listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Just a few of the SWG success stories in Arizona include:

- *Bald eagles*. SWG funding has helped ensure that the bald eagle, America's national symbol, continues to soar over the desert Southwest. It helps fund the nationally recognized Nestwatch program that monitors and helps protect Arizona's breeding populations. Bald eagle numbers in Arizona have grown more than 600 percent in Arizona over the last 30 years thanks to intensive management efforts. SWG funding ensures that those efforts needed to support the viability of this small desert-nesting population will continue regardless of its ESA listing status.
- *Sonoran pronghorn*. Funding from the SWG program is helping Arizona save the endangered Sonoran pronghorn, the fastest native land mammal in the United States. Severe drought in the Southwest reduced the wild population in Arizona to 21 animals in 2002. Due to ongoing management efforts such as building waters and enhancing native habitats, the most recent estimate is 76 in the wild. A Captive Breeding Program has an additional 52 pronghorn, and produced 28 young in 2010. Due to the success of this program, a second captive breeding site is being planned in order to reintroduce pronghorn into other areas of their historic habitat in Arizona.
- *Black-footed ferrets*. Once thought to be extinct, a small population of ferrets was discovered in Wyoming in the early 1980s and captive breeding efforts were begun. In 1996, Arizona's Aubrey Valley was selected as a reintroduction site. The population at that reintroduction site since then has increased enough to be considered self-sustaining, with a record 96 ferrets documented in survey efforts in 2010. Thanks to success in the Aubrey Valley and at sister sites in other states, the black-footed ferret has moved away from the brink of extinction over the past 20 years to the verge of full recovery and delisting. State Wildlife Grants have played (and continue to play) a crucial role, including funding for spotlighting surveys each year to monitor the ferret population. Much has been accomplished during the tenure of this project, and the local community now considers it such a positive addition to community culture and to local commerce that the project has been invited to join the local Chamber of Commerce.
- SWG funding has benefitted many other species in Arizona, including conservation of peregrine falcons, California condors, Arizona's bat species, desert tortoises, Chiricahua leopard frogs, and many others.

It is important to note that it is far more cost-effective to undertake conservation measures (such as those funded by SWG) before ESA comes into play. Without SWG, the capacity for Arizona to conserve the full array of species held in public trust will be severely compromised.

- **The Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act)**. This program would be hit with a 95.2 percent funding reduction compared to FY 2011 (\$2.85 million vs. \$59.9 million) and a 96.7 percent reduction compared to the \$85.3 million funded in FY 2010.

The Section 6 funding provides grants to states to participate in a wide array of voluntary conservation projects for candidate, proposed and listed species. The program provides funding for species and habitat conservation actions on non-federal land and provides federal funding to meet ESA's mandate for the federal government to work with the states. Elimination of this funding would make it more difficult for the states to have adequate participation in decisions affecting wildlife conservation and land use policy.

- **The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA).** This program would be hit with a 46.7 percent funding reduction compared to FY 2011 (\$20 million vs. \$37.4 million) and a 58 percent reduction compared to the \$47.6 million funded in FY 2010.

NAWCA provides matching grants to organizations and individuals that have developed partnerships to carry out wetlands conservation projects for the benefit of wetlands-associated migratory birds and other wildlife. Funding through NAWCA has been used by state agencies and partners to both restore and conserve more than 25.9 million acres of wetlands, riparian areas, and upland habitats. Eliminating funding will exacerbate declines of migratory birds and other fish and wildlife dependent on wetlands.

- **Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act.** This program would be 100 percent defunded from its FY 2011 level of \$3.99 million.

The program provides matching grants to support public-private partnerships that promote the long-term conservation of neotropical migratory birds. Elimination of this funding would negatively impact projects that support the wintering grounds of neotropical birds that are found in Arizona. Many of these birds, such as the elegant trogon or blue-throated hummingbird, are seen nowhere else in the United States and draw bird watchers from all over the world to Arizona, enhancing local economies.

We urge you to restore funding to these programs as you work through this budget process. While we fully acknowledge that conservation programs should shoulder a fair and proportional burden of reductions as required to address the budget deficit, the disproportionate reduction of funding for these programs will undermine the state's ability to have a voice in conservation of wildlife otherwise regulated by federal laws, such as ESA. Loss of funding will result in a strong shift in the balance of management of all species managed under federal Acts to the federal government. These vital programs with long-standing track records of success are foundational to fish, wildlife and habitat conservation, good for the economy in creating jobs (particularly in rural communities), and critical to providing opportunities for America's sportsmen and women.

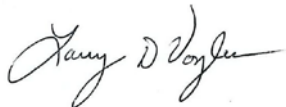
The affected programs are currently budgeted to bring well over \$2 million into Arizona's economy this year alone. But even more important, we cannot overstate the significance or the potential consequences of allowing these funding cuts to eliminate the state's involvement in these programs. The ESA can have an enormous financial impact to the state. We feel that a balance shift toward federalization of wildlife conservation will not only impact the future management of many species native to Arizona, but will directly result in significant impacts to the state's economy due initially to

the loss of the funding and, in the long-term, due to the state not being appropriately represented regarding management decisions.

There are currently 26 Endangered, 12 Threatened and 19 Candidate species found within our state. Others have been routinely petitioned for listing. The above-mentioned grants are the only federal mechanism designed to support management of those species and to ensure the state has a voice at the table regarding federal actions that have a significant impact on Arizona's resources.

Congress has a critical role to serve as stewards of our nation's fish and wildlife populations and has a responsibility to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to states, tribal entities, and partners to manage wildlife held in public trust. We therefore strongly urge you to keep intact, or at the very least proportionately fund, these essential programs designed for the benefit of the state. Thank you for serving as a steward of our natural resources by supporting these programs in the FY12 budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry D. Voyles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Larry D. Voyles, Director