



The National Steering Committee

American Fisheries Society - National Wildlife Federation - American Zoo and Aquarium Association - The Nature Conservancy
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation - National Wild Turkey Federation - Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies - Izaak Walton League of America
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership - The Wildlife Society - National Audubon Society - Wildlife Conservation Society - Wildlife Management Institute

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate

April 26, 2007

On behalf of the Teaming with Wildlife National Steering Committee, we urge you to support funding in the amount of \$85 million for the State Wildlife Grants Program in the Fiscal Year 2008 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

Teaming with Wildlife is a coalition of more than 5,000 organizations, agencies and businesses who support increased funding for state-level wildlife programs of conservation, education, and recreation aimed at keeping wildlife from becoming endangered. The Teaming with Wildlife coalition includes wildlife biologists, hunters & anglers, birdwatchers, hikers, visitors' bureaus, nature-based businesses and other conservationists who believe that working together to advance proactive wildlife conservation will save both wildlife and tax dollars over the long term.

The State Wildlife Grants Program supports proactive on-the-ground conservation projects aimed at declining fish and wildlife species and their habitats. State Wildlife Grants is not just a grants program. It is the nation's core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered in every state. As a coalition of conservation organizations, wildlife management professionals, outdoor enthusiasts, and other supporters of wildlife conservation we have seen the tangible benefits of these projects in the communities where we live and work. Now, in response to a charge from Congress, the state wildlife agencies and their many conservation partners have worked together to complete Wildlife Action Plans for every state and territory. These plans were all officially approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in January 2007. Organizations like ours and the state wildlife agencies we work with are eager to take the next step and begin implementation, but we are counting on funding from the State Wildlife Grants Program to help us put these plans into action. It is the only funding nationwide that is dedicated for this purpose.

We understand the difficult decisions you have to make during this time of tight budgets. Now more than ever, Congress should be focusing limited resources on this kind of smart, proactive conservation investment. Experience shows that efforts to restore imperiled wildlife are difficult and costly. State Wildlife Grants enable states to be proactive and avert such conservation

Teaming with Wildlife

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c/o Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

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catastrophes, concurrently saving wildlife and taxpayer dollars, and improving our quality of life by conserving wildlife for the benefit of millions of Americans. The program also leverages significant funding from private, state, and local sources to magnify the impact of federal dollars.

We are very pleased that the President has recognized the significance of this program and supported an increase above FY 2007's enacted level of \$67.5 million. A funding level of \$85 million would help bring this program back up to the highest level of funding it has ever received, in FY 2002, and would send an important message about the Congress's commitment to following through on providing the support needed to implement the state wildlife action plans. By restoring funding to this program at this critical juncture in the program, the Congress would help protect the foundation of the investment it has made in this program to date. We are pleased that at least 58 have already formally signed on to this commitment in the form of a "dear colleague" and we hope you will match that strong demonstration of support.

Additionally, the President's budget proposes that \$5 million of the new funds recommended for State Wildlife Grants be set aside for a new competitive grants program. The Teaming with Wildlife Steering Committee strongly believes that it would not be an effective use of taxpayer dollars to carve out a new program at current funding levels. The strength of the State Wildlife Grants Program has been the boost it has provided to the capacity of every state to address wildlife conservation. However, considerable work remains to be done at current funding levels. Injecting a competitive program in the current context would serve primarily to reward states that already have high-capacity conservation programs and punish those that are still developing. Allocating funds in this manner would aggravate disparities rather than advance the national interest in keeping wildlife from becoming endangered. We recommend that the Congress hold off on carving out any kind of competitive program until funding for State Wildlife Grants has reached the stable, increased levels that were outlined when the program was created.

We are very grateful for your leadership in funding this program over the last several years. You have helped make this program and its emphasis on preventive conservation a priority for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Although the budget is tight, we look forward to the U.S. Congress continuing to provide reliable and adequate funding to ensure the continued success of the State Wildlife Grants Program.

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