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Statement for the Record

Submitted by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works for an Oversight Hearing
held Thursday, November 15, 2018 on

“Examining State Funding Needs for Wildlife Conservation, Recovery, and Management”

Thank you, Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper, for the opportunity to share with you the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ (Association) perspectives on state funding needs for wildlife conservation, recovery and management. The Association’s mission, which has not changed significantly from our founding in 1902, is to protect state agency authority to conserve and manage the fish and wildlife within their borders, and all 50 state fish and wildlife agencies (states) are members. In meeting that goal, we strive to facilitate cooperation between state and federal agencies, conservation NGOs, and private landowners to conserve our nation’s fish, wildlife and their habitats.

States have the primary legal authority for the conservation and management of fish and wildlife within their borders, including on most federal lands. This is grounded in the tenth amendment to the United States Constitution as well as the Public Trust Doctrine. Fish and wildlife conservation was one of “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, [and thus] are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.” Only Congress can give a federal agency authority to preempt the states’ authority for management of fish and wildlife, and then only for certain federal actions. Congress has repeatedly affirmed that authority to manage fish and wildlife rests with the states for the benefit of the public and future generations.

Over the decades the states have matured in expertise, sophistication, capacity, and experience. Once solely focused on enforcement of game harvest laws and regulations, today they continue to do that and much, much more. They are on the ground, in communities, and on the front lines of most species conservation issues. Citizens, businesses, and landowners are more likely to reach out first to states for assistance with a species concern, even with federally listed species, and the states find ways to step up and help often finding innovative ways to fund their conservation actions and efforts like specialty license plates and donations. They leverage federal dollars and their many partnerships to manage and enhance habitats, share capacity, and deliver technical assistance to private landowners to improve the status of many species across the country. The public expects the states to manage all fish and wildlife species as a public trust resource and assets for future generations, and they are doing all they can with what they have, but the fiscal resources at hand today are not enough to proactively address today’s conservation complexities and growing challenges. The states are still missing the flexibility to adequately communicate with hunters and recreational target shooters and are still missing the dedicated fiscal resources needed to proactively conserve the diverse array of all fish and wildlife within their borders. The Association appreciates the committee’s sincere interest in understanding the fiscal

needs of the states, and many of these challenges can be addressed by current legislation referred to this committee.

The essential role that our natural resources play in American's quality of life and economic prosperity is all too often overlooked. These resources are the lifeblood of many communities and continue as important job and revenue generators at state and national levels. According to the 2017 Outdoor Industry Association report, every year Americans spend more on outdoor recreation (\$887 billion) than they do on pharmaceuticals and fuel, combined (\$770 billion). More Americans are employed by outdoor recreation jobs than those in education, computer technology, insurance and finance, and construction. The outdoor recreation economy generates \$124.5 billion in local, state and federal tax revenues each year. Spending on hunting alone supports more American jobs (195,000) than the combined workforces of Apple and Microsoft (130,000). Access to high quality recreation opportunities drives our economy and continues to be a quality-of-life index criterion, and a key decision point for choosing a location for many of our most productive American industries and contributors to our GDP. All these economic benefits would not exist without healthy fish and wildlife and the habitats they depend on for survival, just as we do. The *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* recognizes and builds a path forward for this synergy to continue to sustain our high quality of life and our economic prosperity together into the future.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act (S3223/HR4647)

Today, we are facing an historic fish and wildlife challenge that could alter future Americans' opportunities to benefit from these resources. Scientists estimate that one-third of wildlife species in the United States are at risk of becoming threatened or endangered unless we pursue proactive, collaborative efforts to accelerate their recovery. The dramatic decline of so many species of diverse wildlife and the habitats they depend on has an adverse effect on fundamental life benefits provided by nature such as water purification and aquifer recharge, flood abatement, pollination, recreation, and food and fiber production that are essential to human health. These species declines threaten Americans' quality of life, as well as our national economy and create costly regulatory uncertainty for businesses, industries, and communities further impacting jobs and the health and economic well-being of our communities. Foreseeing the disconcerting events ahead, the states and the Association acted.

In 2014, prompted by the growing threats to our natural resources, the Association convened a Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources, which was co-chaired by Governor Dave Freudenthal (WY) and Bass Pro Shops founder and CEO John L. Morris and included executives from major corporations and leadership from the nation's leading non-governmental conservation organizations. The panel validated the serious need for a more complete funding model that enables states to more fully deliver conservation actions for all fish and wildlife. The Wildlife Restoration Program and the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Safety Trust Fund are essential and successful in providing reliable and dedicated funding to states for the conservation and management of species that are hunted and fished, respectively, and are responsible for the recovery of these species, some of which were on the brink of extinction. There is no concomitant, dedicated funding source to states for the conservation and management of the full array of species, many of which are trending toward needing a safety net to assist in their stabilization and recovery. States need a dedicated funding source commensurate with their broad conservation missions to restore, conserve, and manage these at-risk species that comprise the lists of species of greatest conservation need compiled by states. We need an innovative funding solution to address a nation-wide fish and wildlife conservation crisis that has the potential to impact all aspects of our American traditions and natural heritage, our economy, and our quality of life.

To accomplish this goal, the Panel recommended a sweeping initiative to dedicate \$1.3 billion annually to the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program, an existing subaccount under the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Program, for states to effectively implement state wildlife action plans. Congress requires each state and U.S. territory to develop a state wildlife action plan – a proactive, comprehensive conservation strategy which examines species’ health and recommends actions to conserve fish, wildlife and vital habitats before they become more rare and in need of additional protections. These plans are unique to each state and are developed with participation from the public. Because fiscal resources to implement these plans are limited, states often rank or prioritize species and/or habitats most in need of conservation attention. Factors that contribute to how a state determines a species’ prioritization and listing as a state species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) include, but are not limited to, the following examples: status as a candidate, threatened or endangered species under the state and/or federal ESA; imminent threat of extinction within the state; subspecies, distinct population segments, and ecological significant units of high conservation concern; an endemic to the state or regionally endemic, range restricted, or geographically disjunct species; threats that have significant impacts to multiple species and their habitats that are driving species toward listing and/or extirpation, whether or not the species are already listed; current or trending habitat factors, changes, and impacts that adversely affect species, pushing them toward listing; and where substantial rangewide declines have been documented or other compelling reasons existed to justify the species’ inclusion as a SCGN. Congress has provided a helping hand for these efforts by funding development of state wildlife action plans through the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program. We are grateful for this recognition of the value of state-based conservation, but we are only able to scratch the surface with this level of support. Without additional resources to reverse the growing list of species declines and possible listings, it is a growing federal and fiscal burden on taxpayers, states, industries and communities.

The panel has since expanded into the Alliance for America’s Fish and Wildlife (Alliance), representing members from the outdoor recreation retail and manufacturing sector, the energy and automotive industries, private landowners, educational institutions, sportsmen’s and other conservation organizations, and states. United by a shared vision and a common purpose, the unprecedented Alliance stands ready to work with you and with Congress to enact and implement this unique solution to the nation’s fish and wildlife crisis.

The Association thanks Senators Risch (ID), Manchin (WV), Alexander (TN) and Heitkamp (ND) and Representatives Jeff Fortenberry (NE) and Debbie Dingell (MI) for understanding the gravity of our growing wildlife crisis and for introducing bipartisan, legislative solutions to make a meaningful investment in this important, state-led conservation work – *the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (S3223/HR4647)*. This legacy legislation is an opportunity to provide a proactive solution that leverages public/private partnerships and brings stakeholders together to reduce potentially costly regulatory burdens and uncertainties and provide economic benefits to our citizens and businesses. Additionally, this legislation is complementary to existing natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation programs and proposes to redirect \$1.3 billion in existing energy and mineral revenues generated from onshore and offshore federal lands and waters to invest in the health and management of habitats and landscapes upon which our citizens and all our fish and wildlife depend.

The *Recovering America’s Wildlife Act* would provide critical resources to states to sustainably lead proactive, voluntary, incentive-based conservation efforts that have proven effective in stabilizing wildlife populations to preclude the need to list species under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The states have shown that addressing the life needs and habitat requirements of declining species across their range before they reach the point where additional protections may be needed, is the more prudent, economically, and biologically sound approach to managing species trending toward listing.

States can use the funds to ameliorate threats and risks to species and their habitats like controlling invasive species like cheatgrass and addressing devastating diseases of bats like White-Nose Syndrome. It would also enable the states to work with private landowners to implement voluntary conservation and management actions without requiring public access, keeping private lands private. Funds provided to the states through this legislation would be leveraged with non-federal match, creating opportunities for new and expanded successful partnerships. The funds would be apportioned to each state based 50% on its proportion of land area and 50% on its proportion of people according to the US Census. The District of Columbia and US territories would also receive funding from the program.

In addition to providing critical resources to proactively manage all fish and wildlife species, the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* also provides states with the ability to communicate and work with the public through wildlife conservation education efforts. The Act allows the states to create and implement wildlife conservation education programs and projects, including public outreach intended to foster natural resource stewardship, and work with the public, industries and communities to develop local wildlife conservation solutions. Further, the legislation advances wildlife-associated recreation projects by allowing states to use up to 10% of a state's apportionment to meet the growing demand for outdoor activities associated with fish and wildlife including but not limited to hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography; wildlife viewing areas, blinds, and platforms; water trails and access; and trails, trail heads and access for such projects. Having a place to go to recreate outdoors is one of the leading challenges to outdoor recreation participation. Outdoor recreation is a part of our great natural heritage—our identity as Americans, and we want to make certain that this natural heritage exists in the same or better condition for future Americans by nurturing a conservation ethic and investing in our natural resources.

We know this is a substantial commitment and investment, but rest assured that the states and their conservation partners are committed to conserving the full array of America's fish and wildlife, and excited to report their conservation outcomes and progress to their citizens and Congress. Investing in the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* will provide economic returns to state, local and federal governments in the form of decreased tax payer expenditures associated with species listings and associated regulations, increased opportunity for wildlife-dependent recreation, growth in the outdoor recreation economy, and increases in associated jobs.

Last month this committee held a hearing about state conservation success stories. States across the country have proven track records and many success stories about reversing species' population declines and bringing them back from the brink of extinction. The states work within their boundaries to conserve endemic species and across state boundaries and across the range of species. Here are a few examples:

- Over the course of 22 years, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife led the recovery efforts of the *Oregon chub* working in concert with local interests. On March 15, 2015, it was the first fish ever to be delisted under the ESA.
- Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho worked together to identify important life history information and movement patterns of the North American wolverine. Through their cooperative actions across the range, the FWS determined that protections of the ESA were not warranted.
- Home to the Greater Sage-Grouse, eleven western states (ND, SD, MT, WY, CO, UT, NV, CA, ID, OR, and WA) developed and implemented individual state conservation plans and strategies that collectively led to a not warranted listing determination under the ESA. These plans still serve to drive conservation of the species and its habitats, avoidance and management of threats, and mitigation actions.
- The New England Cottontail Regional Initiative is another excellent example of how multiple states worked together in partnership with FWS, other federal agencies and conservation

partners across state boundaries to recover an imperiled species and preclude the need for listing it under the ESA. This was a heroic 10-year proactive conservation strategy across six New England states (ME, NH, NY, CT, MA, RI). They coordinated and orchestrated implementation of habitat management regimes in 31 of 47 Focal Areas with targets as fine as the parcel level. More than \$41.6 million in grants was obtained and dedicated to conserving this candidate species, and because of their conservation actions on the ground across the range of this species, the New England Cottontail Regional Initiative was successful, and protections of the ESA were not warranted.

- The Lesser Prairie Chicken Range-wide Plan developed by Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico and Colorado successfully deployed voluntary conservation actions on private lands to protect and improve habitat for the Lesser Prairie Chicken. Energy companies, states, nonprofits, and others successfully implemented conservation actions and ongoing strategies such that protections of the ESA were not warranted.
- Alabama ranks first in aquatic biodiversity in the United States. It has more species of freshwater fishes, mussels, snails, and crayfish than anywhere else on the continent. The Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division is leading the way on management and recovery of these aquatic species through their work at the Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center (AABC), which is the largest state non-game recovery program of its kind in the United States. The AABC promotes the conservation, restoration and recovery of rare freshwater species in state waters where future generations will benefit from the clean water initiatives these unique species can promote.

Every success story is directly related to the states' and their partners' dedication, steady efforts, and commitments to achieving a shared goal. Species management and recovery require dedicated funding to afford states the ability to craft and implement a multiyear species conservation plan with the human capacity and expertise needed to assess the population status, determine causes of decline, ameliorate threats and risks affecting the species and its habitats, restore and enhance those habitats and populations, monitor responses to management actions, and adjust course as necessary to achieve success. Inconsistent funding from year to year can compromise every critical step of this process and lead to prolonged recovery times and even failure. Most species recovery efforts take a decade or more as evidenced by the time-lapsed from a federal species listing to delisting.

While we know the prospect of enacting legislation that provides dedicated funding may be a challenging prospect for some members of Congress, we also know it is truly the best solution to the fish and wildlife conservation crisis we face today. Not all mandatory funding is created equal and not all programs with such funding grow federal expenditures over time. In fact, *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* should save taxpayer dollars over time by precluding the need to list species under the ESA. Congress may authorize an infrastructure project today only to have the actual cost increase significantly by the time the project is ready to break ground in the future, and this isn't a blank check that gets larger every year without consent from Congress. From a budgeting perspective, dedicated funding is the most fiscally conservative approach to managing both the nation's financial resources and our fish and wildlife. Further, Congress has already prescribed under the existing authority of the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program the uses of funds which requires involvement from the public, has fiscal accountability and financial leveraging already built into the program, and requires progress reporting to stakeholders and Congress.

Each species that is precluded from listing under the ESA will save millions of dollars incurred through the state and federal agencies' staffs time and processes of processing data and federal notices for petitions, listing determinations, critical habitat designations, potential 4(d) rules, consultations and permits, and more time and money needed to create and implement conservation tools such as Safe

Harbor Agreements and Habitat Conservation Plans. And while species listed under the ESA need these fiscal and human resources, it is more affordable to deploy proactive, voluntary conservation actions that will preclude the need to list species under the ESA and thus over the long-term reduce federal expenditures while increasing our ability to recover species before it is more biologically and ecologically difficult. The old adage is true in this case -- an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The states respectfully ask this Committee and other members of Congress to support dedicated funding for the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act*. States have a proven track record of recovering species with dedicated funding as evidenced by over 80 years of success through the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act. The states can build upon their current efforts to conserve the full array of diverse fish and wildlife, together with their conservation partners and private landowners, if afforded the opportunity. The Association respectfully asks you to help enact *the Recovering America's Wildlife Act* this Congress with dedicated funding.

Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow's Needs Act (HR2591/S1613)

This bill neither seeks a new source of federal funding nor imparts a federal mandate of any kind. Rather, this bill simply gives states the flexibility to address today's priority problems using existing funds from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Fund (P-R).

Since 1937, sportsmen and women have been the driving force for conservation funding in the United States. Over \$10 billion have been collected through the P-R from hunters and recreational target shooters, and apportioned to states to fund wildlife conservation, habitat acquisition and management, public access, hunter education and safety, and shooting ranges affiliated with hunter safety programs. This program has unquestionably served as the lifeblood for wildlife conservation in this nation for more than 80 years. Despite P-R's magnanimous success, the allowable uses for funding under this program must be updated to accommodate modern challenges unimaginable in 1937, if we are to adequately secure our wildlife conservation and natural heritage future.

For the past several decades, the number of licensed hunters across the United States (U.S.) has been on a steady and precipitous decline. More recently, the preliminary results of the 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) indicate that hunting has declined by 16 percent since 2011. This equates to a reduction of 2.2 million hunters over the 5-year period. Previously, over the period from 1980 to 2011, a decline of 3.7 million hunters occurred. These numbers indicate that there are now approximately 11.5 million active hunters in the United States. Additionally, the average age of Americans purchasing hunting licenses is steadily rising thus further detailing the lack of recruitment and retention. This recent accelerated decline is alarming and should be viewed as a wakeup call to not only states, industry, and conservation groups, but sportsmen and women everywhere. While there are many contributing factors to the participation decline noted above, these overarching impacts on our human population have made it more difficult for the public to participate in hunting and recreational target shooting as public access, time, and available resources are all strained.

It is now more important than ever that we address the changing dynamic to meet the needs of the modern sportsperson. Without increasing taxes or existing user fees, this legislation will ensure user-pay funding of wildlife conservation for future generations. Specifically, the bill clarifies that a purpose of the fund is to extend assistance to the states for the promotion of hunting and recreational target shooting, and that state expenditures may include spending for the outreach, communication, education and promotion of hunting and recreational target shooting. To better communicate with today's sportspersons, the legislation would allow states to use modern communication methods to inform and educate hunters and recreational target shooters like our agency currently does for fishing and boating,

creating parity. Constituents expect the states to use modern methods and means to communicate with them, but much of these activities are currently prohibited under current law and considered “public relations.” Moreover, the ability to communicate with our resident and non-resident hunters is imperative to more proactively prevent and slow the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) across the nation. Many hunters still do not know about CWD, if it is present where they are hunting, precautions they should take if it is, how CWD is transmitted, or other important aspects of the disease.

The Association respectfully requests that Congress enact this legislation this session. States must have the ability to communicate better with the hunting public and together do what we can to control CWD. Finally, the bill would expand the Multistate Conservation Grant Program to include \$5 million in recreational target shooter recruitment grants that promote state implementation of a national hunting and shooting sport recruitment program. In the interest of time with few legislative days left, we respectfully request the committee move this legislation forward as soon as possible and enact it this Congress.

The Association thanks the Chairman and Ranking Member’s work on the *Hunting Heritage and Environmental Preservation for Wildlife Act (HELP Act)*. That Association supports passage of the *HELP Act* and the many provisions contained therein, including returning management authority of wolves in the Great Lakes and Wyoming back to the states. The FWS has testified before Congress that gray wolves are recovered and should no longer be listed under the ESA. We appreciate Congress’s recognition of this fact and actions to address the issue.

National Fish Habitat Conservation Through Partnerships Act

The Association strongly supports the National Fish Habitat Conservation Through Partnerships Act and greatly appreciates and benefits from the great collaborative fish habitat work that occurs through the 20 fish habitat partnerships nationwide. A partnership of state agency staff, conservation organizations, and local communities the program strategically leverages state and local resources and capacities to address fish and fish habitat conservation needs through collaborative restoration, conservation, and habitat enhancement efforts. I appreciate the committee’s work on this important piece of legislation and its inclusion in the *HELP Act*, and we look forward to its enactment.

North American Wetlands Conservation Act

The Association strongly supports reauthorization of the *North American Wetlands Conservation Act* as proposed in the *HELP Act*. This is another highly collaborative program that leverages state, federal, private and nonprofit funds to protect, restore, enhance and manage wetland habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. These are the same wetlands we all depend on for clean water, flood attenuation, aquifer recharge, and healthy environments. Further, for each federal dollar, one partner dollar must be matched, but every federal NAWCA dollar is usually tripled by partners at the state and local levels making this a highly efficient program. We thank the committee for your leadership in reauthorizing this important program.

The Association also supports enactment of the *Wildlife Innovation and Longevity Driver Act (WILD Act)*, the proposed innovative incentives to solve complex wildlife challenges, reauthorization of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, and improvements to the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act included therein.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Conservation

The Association continues to support reauthorization of the *Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program* as proposed in the *WILD Act* which passed this Committee and passed the Senate by unanimous consent. This highly successful program is an integral part of collaborative fish and wildlife conservation efforts

with private landowners and the FWS across the country and has been one of the cornerstone programs used by private landowners for conserving listed species. The program is well-received by private landowners and agricultural producers, is solution-oriented, doesn't remove lands from the county's tax rolls, and cooperatively enhances fish and wildlife habitats for many declining, at-risk, and listed species. We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member and members of the committee for your leadership in reauthorizing this important program.

Fish & Wildlife Coordination Amendment

The Association deeply appreciates efforts to improve state and federal coordination under the *Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act*. Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are a serious problem for all states, and we must work together to reduce and eliminate any new introductions of AIS and better control and manage the AIS currently within the United States. We welcome the amendment proposed in the *WILD Act* and look forward to working with this Committee next year to further explore additional ways to improve state-federal coordination under this Act.

Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018

The *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* also would provide the states with the option of enhancing their engagement in federally listed species recovery efforts such as with recovery planning and recovery plan implementation. Limited agency capacity, current species priorities, or a focus on recovering candidate species, and precluding listings may take precedence over recovering listed species for some states. However, many others would welcome the opportunity to constructively exercise their concurrent authority for management of species listed under the ESA and exercise cooperative federalism principles.

It is difficult to assess the costs of time and efforts required to manage and recover federally listed species. It seems to vary significantly depending on how wide ranging a species is, how much information already exists on a species' life history and status, and how many people and agencies require coordination assistance throughout the ESA processes. We suspect the federal agencies have estimated costs associated with the federal register notice (FRN) processes, which could be up to six FRNs per species listed. But costs do not stop there – there are federal agency coordination efforts, consultations, permits, technical assistance, development and implementation tools, recovery plan development and implementation, status reviews and assessments, and other actions for which federal cost estimates collectively remain elusive. However, these are real actions that without adequate funding slow not just the federal processes but also the pace at which recovery can occur and, in some instances, likely prolongs the time needed to achieve recovery and delist a species. This undoubtedly leads to increased costs over time and even compromises our ability to successfully recover some species. In some instances, we can identify some of the states' costs for recovery efforts, but much of the federal and conservation partner details are unavailable. Florida estimated they raised and spent \$44 million to help recover and downlist the West Indian manatee from endangered to threatened, which does not include funds used by the federal agencies on manatee recovery efforts. Here are few more examples of states' dedication and efforts to recover species.

Moving north along the East Coast, Delmarva Fox Squirrels in the Mid-Atlantic were delisted in 2015 due to the great work of Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and Pennsylvania over the course of 48 years. They worked closely with federal, industry, academic and conservation partners, and most importantly private landowners. In this case, a listed species was recovered predominately on private lands without the use of a Habitat Conservation Plan or Safe Harbor Agreements. That is a testament to the trust and value of state's relationships with families and communities when they work side-by-side to recover America's wildlife, but the collective costs incurred by all parties and associated with recovery over the course of 48 years is impossible to calculate.

Over the course of 22 years, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) led the recovery efforts of the *Oregon chub*. The ODFW biologists worked in concert with local nonprofits, private landowners, Tribes, multiple federal agencies and others grow the struggling fish population from fewer than 1,000 individuals in eight known populations in the wild to over 140,000 *chub* in 80 populations along the Willamette River and its tributaries. On February 17, 2015, the *Oregon chub* was the first fish ever to be delisted under the ESA.

Piping plovers are small, stocky shorebirds that nest on sandy coastal beaches and dunes. They are listed as threatened by the state of Massachusetts and by the FWS. Knowing the needs of Massachusetts' wildlife, the importance of the states' beaches to local economies and citizens' natural heritage, and the difficulties associated with successfully balancing all these issues with a federally listed species, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) took the lead in writing and implementing the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for recovering piping plovers in Massachusetts with a variety of stakeholders from coastal communities and the FWS. The FWS approved the HCP in July 2016, and since then MassWildlife advances piping plover recovery efforts; maintains and improves public access, recreational opportunities, and economic activity associated with the state's beaches; and streamlines the state and federal permitting process into a one-stop-shopping experience for its citizens and businesses. In 1986 there were only 140 breeding pairs of piping plovers in Massachusetts and today there are close to 700 breeding pairs because of the collaborative efforts of beach managers, private landowners and MassWildlife.

Once federally listed in 1967, the bald eagle was delisted 40 years later in 2007, after the states pulled together with the FWS across the range to protect nesting pairs, address threats to survival, and restore the bald eagle to healthy population levels across the lower 48 states.

Thank you for considering the perspectives of the Association. We look forward to working with you to enact these important pieces of legislation as soon as possible. If you have any questions, please direct them to the Association's Government Affairs Director, Mrs. Jen Mock Schaeffer, at jenmock@fishwildlife.org.