



Defenders of Wildlife 2020 Accomplishment Highlights

During this difficult and unprecedented year, Defenders of Wildlife has continued to make important progress for imperiled species like wolves, bison, bats, ocelots and orca as well as vital landscapes across the United States.

During 2020, Defenders worked to prevent any drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, made significant progress toward re-establishing protections for migratory birds under the weakened Migratory Bird Treaty Act, ushered in vitally important new protections for endangered species like desert tortoises and led the way toward the restoration of gray wolves to the wildlands of Colorado through a historic ballot initiative. And in the midst of the global COVID-19 crisis, Defenders has worked with partners across the globe to end wildlife trade, stop habitat degradation and ultimately help prevent another pandemic.

As we continue our fight to protect and restore America's natural heritage, we are truly grateful to have generous and determined partners like you. Below are some of our major accomplishments from the past year that you helped us to achieve.

Conserving Key Species

- Proposition 114, passed by Colorado voters on election day, directs the state to reintroduce wolves to Colorado, where they have been absent for nearly 80 years. Defenders worked tirelessly in support of this outcome, mobilizing scores of volunteers and promoting public awareness of the wolf among Colorado voters as a critical species in the state's ecosystem. The Colorado ballot measure is the first time in history that voters in any state have chosen to bring back an endangered species. This victory comes at a crucial time for wolf conservation on the heels of a federal decision to delist wolves nationally. Defenders is continuing our public outreach efforts to prepare the public for the return of wolves, developing relationships with key working partners on the ground and hosting our vital "Ranching with Predators" workshops.
- On January 29, Defenders won an important victory in our case challenging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) 2016 decision to list the northern long-eared bat only as threatened despite overwhelming evidence that it faces imminent risk of extinction. Once the most commonly found bat in the northeastern United States and Canada, the northern long-eared bat has been devastated by white-nose syndrome, a fungal infection that kills hibernating bats. The Service proposed in 2013 to list the species as endangered, but reversed course after intense lobbying by the forest products, oil and gas, farming and construction industries. Defenders and other groups challenged the listing decision in federal district court in D.C. In a significant victory for the northern long-eared bat and for the integrity of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the court concluded that the FWS's decision

not to give the bat the full protections afforded to endangered species was arbitrary and careless.

- Defenders was a key voice leading to the Washington state legislature finalizing a supplemental budget in March providing over \$26 million in new general fund money for key wildlife conservation efforts. Highlights include resources for implementing new shoreline habitat protections, increased vessel patrols in Puget Sound to protect endangered orcas and greater support for predator-livestock coexistence measures such as increased range rider efforts.
- In mid-May, in response to a petition by Defenders and Sierra Forest Legacy, FWS listed fishers in the southern Sierra Nevada as endangered under the ESA. Fishers face a variety of threats including climate change, rodenticide poisoning from illegal marijuana cultivation and vehicle collisions, as well as habitat loss from tree mortality, wildfires and logging. Researchers estimate there to be less than 300 adult fishers in the highly isolated southern Sierra population.
- FWS successfully re-released two breeding pairs of endangered red wolves in the Alligator River and Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuges. This effort has been ongoing since December, and Defenders has been a leading NGO partner directly involved in funding, outreach and advocacy efforts leading up to the releases. The success of these releases is an important step toward finally rebuilding this beleaguered wild population. Our teams are continuing to promote the importance of allowing future releases.
- Defenders won a landmark victory for the highly endangered North Atlantic right whale, which is deeply imperiled by ship strikes and fishing net entanglements. Currently there are only about 400 right whales left in existence. Defenders has been involved in conservation efforts surrounding the species for years, but new data released in 2017 showed how rapidly the population was declining, which kicked our efforts into an even higher gear. We quickly filed a lawsuit against the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for its failure to protect the species. Though the wheels of justice often move slowly, on April 9th Defenders finally won our case, with the judge finding that NMFS had failed to protect the critically endangered species and that its biological opinion on the fishery violated “straightforward” requirements of the Act, putting the whales at greater risk of entanglement.
- Defenders also played an integral role in an effort to secure a total of \$6.5 million for research and monitoring of North Atlantic right whales in the FY2021 House version of the Commerce, Justice and Science appropriations bill, a total increase of \$3.5 million and more than double the FY2020 allocation of \$3 million.
- Defenders led the introduction of H.R. 7876, the Polar Bear Cub Survival Act of 2020, a bill we drafted to prohibit oil and gas activities from occurring within one mile of polar bear maternal denning habitat, effectively protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil and gas development. Approximately 75,000 supporters of Defenders and other organizations contacted Congress to support the bill, and it has activated new allies like Polar Bears International, which recently endorsed it. Member offices have been overwhelmingly supportive, garnering needed attention to polar bears and wildlife in the Refuge while also

rallying support for future legislation. We also met with Hill leaders and champions to organize responses and oversight opportunities after the Trump administration formally approved the oil and gas program for the refuge.

- The greater sage-grouse is a charismatic bird which needs large tracts of sagebrush grasslands in the West. Since 2014, Congress has continuously passed annual appropriations riders blocking FWS from carrying out its basic responsibilities under the ESA to list and protect greater sage-grouse. Defenders is leading a coalition to oppose the perennial rider, and this year we were successful in excluding the rider from the FY2021 House Interior appropriations bill, as was also the case in the FY2020 bill. We expect the Senate to push for inclusion of the rider in the final FY2021 bill, and we will be making a major push to remove it once and for all.
- After learning that approximately 96% of the estimated population of Alexander Archipelago wolves on Prince of Wales Island was collected by trappers during the 2019-2020 winter season, Defenders filed a petition to FWS in July to list the Alaska population of the wolf as a distinct population segment under the ESA. We organized NGO partners to submit a joint letter to the Forest Service to meet its independent responsibility under the forest plan to ensure the sustainability of this sensitive population. The Forest Service responded positively to our letter and plans to convene a stakeholder process in the coming year seeking input and consensus around wolf management, which we will participate in.
- This summer, agency biologists confirmed that captive-reared Florida grasshopper sparrows released in 2019 and 2020 are breeding in the wild. Defenders has long encouraged direct intervention to prevent the extinction of these critically endangered sparrows. Defenders spearheaded a “Conserve Wildlife” license plate to provide funding to the captive breeding program, which scientists hope may allow the birds to rebound.
- During July and August, Defenders and our local partners constructed two new rain garden projects at public schools in Washington state and completed much needed maintenance at three existing ones, even while adhering to COVID-19 related safety restrictions. These rain gardens directly benefit endangered southern resident orcas by filtering out pollutants that otherwise would run off into the marine environment.
- In October, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife voted in favor of Defenders’ petition to the California Fish and Game Commission to change the listing of the desert tortoise from threatened to endangered under the California ESA. Strengthening protections for desert tortoises is important step forward for the species’ survival, as it faces climate change, habitat loss and increased off-road vehicle use.
- Defenders worked in collaboration with partner organizations and the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana to begin a multi-year reintroduction of swift foxes to the reservation, where they have long been absent. Building on Defenders’ work supporting reintroduction of swift fox to the Blackfoot Nation (1998-2002) and Fort Peck Reservation (2009-2011), Defenders purchased GPS collars for the project and worked with partners to trap 40-50 foxes in Wyoming for release at Fort Belknap.

- Defenders developed a Beaver Habitat Suitability model for New Mexico to facilitate coordination with the Department of Game and Fish on beaver coexistence. The model identifies acceptable relocation sites for beavers that have come into conflict with humans, and where their dams will support recovery of imperiled aquatic and riparian species.
- Defenders developed a new range-rider partnership with the San Carlos Apache Tribe in Arizona, which supports a tribal member to work closely with Defenders. The San Carlos Apache Tribe controls 1.8 million acres of mostly excellent wolf habitat, which is utilized by at least three Mexican gray wolf packs.

Protecting International Wildlife

- Defenders participated in the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Conference of the Parties 13 held in India in February. CMS is an environmental treaty of the United Nations, and the Conference brings together 131 member nations to implement international protections for migratory species and their habitats. Defenders advocated for adoption of a proposal by Argentina, Bolivia and other Latin American countries to list the jaguar in Appendices I and II of the treaty. The proposal, which was adopted by consensus, will protect jaguar habitat connectivity throughout its entire range and require concerted action for the jaguar's survival. In addition, we worked to build consensus for the listing of the endangered oceanic whitetip shark in Appendix I of the CMS, protecting it from being killed.
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which scientists believe was transmitted to humans from wild animals, Defenders is advocating forcefully for the closure of markets selling live wildlife and for stronger measures to combat wildlife trafficking around the world. Defenders joined a coalition letter signed by more than 200 organizations requesting that the World Health Organization, the World Animal Health Organization and the United Nations Environment Program work with governments to close wildlife markets and joined in a petition drive to end the sale of live wild animals for human consumption.
- Defenders continues to press for greater regulation of wildlife trade in order to protect public health and safeguard biodiversity. Defenders joined in a letter asking the European Union (EU) Commission to request EU countries to effectively regulate wildlife trade, and joined the "Prevent Pandemics" campaign, which seeks to shut down high-risk wildlife markets, scale up efforts to combat wildlife trafficking and halt trade of high-risk taxa and reduce consumer demand for high-risk wildlife products. We joined a coalition of conservation groups requesting that the Trump administration support a permanent ban on wild-animal markets that could become sources for future pandemics. We also called on the United States' G20 Sherpa to commit to ending international trade in wild animals and their products at the G20 Leaders' Summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in November 2020.
- Defenders co-authored a new study which found that the wildlife trade is a major threat to biodiversity in the Americas. Researchers found that more than 1,500 species are under threat of extinction, in large part due to poaching and wildlife trafficking. Defenders will continue to call on Central American nations to act to halt illegal trade in wildlife and

advocate for consuming countries to act to decrease demand for illegal wildlife products.

- Birdlife International's Globally Threatened Bird Forums used information compiled by Defenders on the illegal trade of the Orange-fronted parakeet (*Eupsittula canicularis*) to propose uplisting the species to Vulnerable status on the IUCN Red List.
- Defenders' scarlet macaw reintroduction project in Mexico has had another very successful year. The artificial nest boxes that Defenders helped fund resulted in seven nestlings, including six in the artificial nests and one in a nearby natural nest. The newly released population is getting established and is starting to increase on its own.
- Defenders helped draft a bill that will ban the sale of wildlife species and their products in Mexico City's markets. It was presented by deputies of two Parties in Mexico City's Congress. If adopted, it will curb the sale of illegal wildlife nationally given that these markets are regional distribution hubs.

Protecting Habitats

- Tongass National Forest is one of our country's last, primarily intact and important temperate rainforests, providing irreplaceable habitat for a vast array of iconic and endemic wildlife. With partners, Defenders challenged the adequacy of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) supporting the U.S. Forest Service's proposal to allow old growth logging on Prince of Wales Island. In March, the Alaska federal district court ruled in our favor. The project had the potential to destroy 23,000 acres of old-growth forest land, and the precedent-setting decision caused the Forest Service to delay a similar project in the central Tongass.
- On June 1, a federal judge ruled in our favor regarding our lawsuit opposing road construction through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. This was a second attempt by the Trump administration to approve a land exchange to allow for construction of a road through a protected wilderness area in a national wildlife refuge that is vital to wildlife conservation in the region. This is a huge win for this habitat, the incredible diversity of wildlife that depend on it and for the National Wildlife Refuge System as a whole.
- In July, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) published an EIS for the proposed Pebble Mine, an open-pit gold and copper mine upstream from the world's largest sockeye salmon fishery in Bristol Bay, Alaska, that failed to address numerous potential biological impacts of the mine. Defenders joined technical comments submitted to the Corps and the State of Alaska regarding the FEIS and mine development proposal. In August, in a surprising turn of events, the Corps sent a letter to Pebble Limited Partnership indicating that discharges at the mine site would cause "unavoidable adverse impacts" to aquatic resources that would result in "significant degradation" to those resources and requiring that mitigation measures be put into place to prevent these discharges. In November, the Corps rejected the permit application, hopefully putting an end to this damaging project.
- During July and August, Defenders' staff and contractors began surveying road infrastructure, culverts and bridges in New Mexico to assess impacts on passage of imperiled

fish and amphibians. This aquatic connectivity work is being conducted in partnership with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish through its “Share with Wildlife” program. As part of this program, Defenders is also installing a series of beaver dam "analogs" on national forests to re-create beaver, fish and amphibian habitat.

- On August 24, Defenders, the Gwich'in Steering Committee, and a coalition of eleven other groups filed suit in federal district court for the District of Alaska challenging the Department of the Interior's finalization of an oil and gas leasing program on Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is a vital and irreplaceable landscape that polar bears and hundreds of other species depend on for habitat. The suit alleges that the Interior Department's decision violates the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Wilderness Act, and the ESA. Our complaint will be amended after the required notice period to add a claim challenging BLM's unlawful reliance on FWS's biological opinion on the Refuge leasing program.
- Defenders played a key part in the permanent protection of nearly 20 square miles of land in California. Located in eastern San Luis Obispo County, this new state reserve will cover 12,168 acres. Though this is a relatively small area, it is a sensitive and incredibly unique habitat and a vital wildlife corridor that is home to a suite of imperiled, grassland species listed under federal and state ESAs.
- Defenders' Center for Conservation Innovation issued a report, [Getting to 30x30: Guidelines for Decision-Makers](#), identifying key issues, such as the critical roles of federal and private lands, in achieving the broad goal of protecting 30% of U.S. lands and waters for biodiversity and climate by 2030.
- Defenders won an important victory in one of our cases challenging the construction of a Southern border wall. The District Court for the District of Columbia denied the government's motion to dismiss our claims challenging the Trump administration's reassignment of funds in excess of appropriations to the border wall. Although the judge dismissed other constitutional and statutory claims, we have a viable challenge in the district court to the current administration's funding of the border wall. In addition, in a different case challenging the constitutionality of the Trump administration's waiver of environmental laws to build the wall, the Supreme Court has ordered the government to brief whether the Court should grant certiorari to hear our claims, suggesting the possibility that it might grant review.
- Defenders led a successful campaign in Florida to secure enactment of a law reforming the legal treatment of heirs' property, with important benefits for habitat conservation in the state. For many decades, large numbers of disadvantaged families in Florida, including a disproportionate number of African American families, have had inherited real property forcibly sold as a result of an unjust property law known as partition law. The new law restricts such partition sales, protecting the public's property rights and curbing logging and other development that damages habitat for gopher tortoises and other imperiled species.

- Defenders successfully worked with the Nevada congressional delegation and committee staff to pass versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in the House and the Senate that rejected any expansion of an Air Force testing range onto Desert National Wildlife Refuge. Defenders led an urgent response to remove language inserted in the House's bill that would have given primary control of approximately 850,000 acres of the refuge to the Air Force, allowing significant ground disturbances and limitless training activities. Defenders was the first to identify the problem, alert the broader environmental community, offer solutions and mobilize the public. After tens of thousands of our supporters contacted Congress and we led over 200 other organizations in opposition, the final bill included an amendment from the Nevada representatives (that we took the lead in drafting) rejecting the giveaway.
- As a direct result of Defenders' input, the FY2021 House Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations bill included language directing the transfer of \$75 million to FWS for mitigation of border wall construction on federal lands. While eventual remediation and breaching or removal of wall will require much more funding – likely billions – the fact that language was included to transfer DHS funding to FWS for the first time is a noteworthy development.
- Defenders continued our campaign to protect at-risk wildlife of the Sagebrush Sea from the onslaught of threats from the current administration. In July, we hosted a successful coalition press event to raise awareness of multiple intersecting threats to the Sagebrush Sea. We coordinated and submitted comments challenging Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposals to punch pipelines into Wyoming's sagebrush country, massively expand livestock grazing in sage-grouse habitat in Nevada, and allow salvage logging up to 5,000 acres without environmental or public review.
- Defenders and our local partners have collected 7,600 signatures on a petition to the Texas Governor to stop construction of the Permian Highway Pipeline through the Edwards Plateau, a region of extraordinary biodiversity and sensitive Karst aquifers. The pipeline will disturb habitat for the golden checked warbler, native salamanders and endemic arachnids.
- Defenders led the creation of the Okefenokee Protection Alliance, a coalition of over thirty national, regional and local conservation groups devoted to ensuring the protection of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, the largest national wildlife refuge east of the Mississippi River. Defenders generated 15,000 comments opposing mining operations proposed along the edge of the swamp.
- As part of our national forest defense campaign, Defenders pressed the Gila National Forest to develop a forest management plan that effectively protects the at-risk species that depend on this 3-million-acre expanse of public lands in New Mexico. Defenders' Federal Lands Program identified several species strongholds that provide essential habitat for imperiled species on this rugged public land and recommended the Gila National Forest specifically protect these areas under the plan to advance biodiversity conservation. We also generated over 12,000 signatures from Defenders' members and supporters asking the Forest Service to improve wildlife protections in the Gila land management plan.

Defending and Expanding Bedrock Environmental Laws

- Defenders was instrumental in the passage of New Mexico's Wildlife Trafficking Act, signed into law in March. New Mexico is the 11th state to pass a law empowering state and local law enforcement to combat illegal wildlife trafficking, but unlike other states, New Mexico's law applies to every species on CITES Appendix I (an international designation that includes species at the very highest risk of extinction).
- Defenders won a huge victory for migratory birds when, on August 11, a federal district court in New York vacated a legal opinion by the Department of the Interior Solicitor declaring that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) does not protect birds from incidental take by industry. Judge Caproni's resonant ruling begins with a quote from Harper Lee's iconic book *To Kill a Mockingbird*. "It is not only a sin to kill a mockingbird, it is also a crime. That has been the letter of the law for the past century." Additionally, Defenders continues to advocate for Representative Alan Lowenthal's (D-Calif.) Migratory Bird Protection Act, H.R. 5552, which would reaffirm the law's intent to protect migratory birds from industrial activities. In July, we hosted and moderated a congressional briefing for Hill staff on the bill, which currently has 94 cosponsors.
- Defenders led a successful lobbying effort to secure critical funding for USDA Wildlife Services in the FY2021 House Agriculture Appropriations bill. The bill included \$1.38 million for Wildlife Services to maintain newly hired employees dedicated exclusively to promoting and implementing nonlethal livestock-predator conflict deterrence techniques in up to 12 states. The committee appropriated this funding for the first time in FY2020 following a lobbying campaign by Defenders.
- Even without the ability to walk the halls of Congress, our committed Government Relations team has been closely engaged in shaping provisions in the Infrastructure package in the House of Representatives—a bill which had the potential to impact dozens of environmental issues important to Defenders. For a while, it looked as though positive progress for wildlife was going to be completely left out of the nearly 2,300-page bill. However, after weeks of unrelenting, proactive outreach by Defenders, we helped to get some *incredible* provisions in the bill, including legislation that would establish a national wildlife corridor protection program and millions of dollars to facilitate wildlife crossings over highways, mitigate harmful roads on national forest lands, and support the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's efforts to restore coastal wildlife habitat.
- Defenders continues to be laser focused on challenging any attempt to undermine the ESA—which remains our best tool for saving wildlife. For years, opponents have tried to dismantle the law on the grounds that protection of species should be a local concern, not a Federal government issue. Defenders has challenged these claims every time they have come up. Recently, we stepped in again and won an important victory for a rare Texas arachnid called the Bone Cave Harvestman—whose federal listing had been challenged by a couple of landowners that were trying to undermine the ESA and get the species prematurely delisted. Defenders intervened and argued this case by Zoom call, winning a powerful result for this spider and the ESA.

- Defenders helped achieve a very successful House and Senate letter advocating for increasing funding to the ESA. The Senate letter included all the Democrats on the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, and the House letter had 121 signers and was bipartisan.
- Despite the current pandemic crisis, the administration is aggressively moving forward to advance environmental rollbacks including ones targeting the MBTA, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and NEPA. Defenders has joined multiple community letters to the administration urging it to pause the rulemakings and extend comment periods. We worked with Senator Tom Udall who sent a letter urging a pause to the director of the Office of Management and Budget signed by 22 Senators, and Representative Alan Lowenthal, who sent a similar letter to Secretary Bernhardt of the Department of the Interior signed by 71 Representatives.
- Defenders submitted a detailed plan for our nation’s wildlife to the Biden transition team. The plan lays out how to heal the damage done in recent years and make urgently needed forward progress in protecting the nation’s natural legacy. Additionally, Defenders staff have participated in working group discussions with conservation allies on topics including our recommendations for the next president, the next Interior Secretary and many other key agencies like FWS.
- Defenders staff testified at congressional hearings twice this year on topics like the ESA and the biodiversity crisis. Defenders is a go-to expert for Congress on biodiversity and being asked to testify always speaks to our expertise and reputation on Capitol Hill. This includes Defenders’ President and CEO Jamie Rappaport Clark testimony at a US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works hearing on a bill (S. 4589) that would weaken the ESA.

Enhancing Conservation Through Science and Technology

- Defenders is leading the conservation community’s engagement on a new definition of “habitat” under the ESA being proposed by FWS and NMFS. In July, we published a paper in [Environmental Law Reporter](#) providing a scientific, policy and legal analysis and proposing a definition of “habitat” that would advance the purposes of the ESA by broadly protecting habitat needed for species’ recovery, including habitat that may need restoration or that may become essential as climate changes. Our analysis has informed our comments and those of other organizations on the Services’ proposed new regulatory definition, which would severely restrict protection of critical habitat under the ESA.
- Defenders helped garner coverage of the ongoing ecological disaster of the border wall, highlighting the plight of seven threatened and endangered aquatic species at San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona. An FWS analysis that we obtained warned that wetlands on which these species depend are being dried as a result of groundwater pumping by Customs and Border Protection or their contractors. Because of waivers issued under the REAL ID Act—the broadest waiver ever enacted in United States history, providing absolute and virtually unreviewable discretion to the Secretary of Homeland Security to exempt the department from any law—no environmental review or ESA consultation has

been conducted on the continuing construction.

- On the groundbreaking technology front, our dedicated Center for Conservation Innovation (CCI) team has launched a powerful new application called [Habitat Patrol](#), which provides a simple and easy-to-use way for officials and the public to monitor and scan vast areas for habitat change. Tracking the extent of historic habitat loss is *crucial* to protecting species, and this tool will keep the FWS and other agencies accountable, while also helping them do their jobs better.
- FWS adopted CCI-generated refined range maps for ESA-listed species. Refined range maps are essential for making better decisions under the ESA, and our work drove the Service to make real progress on addressing the issue, with over 100 ESA-listed species now having new maps.
- Working with Defenders' Conservation Law team, CCI analyzed water releases from the Bonnet Carre spillway between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain, concluding that opening the spillway significantly changes water quality characteristics like salinity in the lake and is likely to harm ESA-listed species. Those analyses form part of the basis for Defenders' lawsuit just filed against the Army Corps of Engineers for inadequate section 7 consultation on these operations.
- Defenders participated in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) joint task force meeting in Bonn, Germany. IPBES is the organization that assembled last year's global assessment of the status and trends of biodiversity, including the finding that 1 million species may be at risk of extinction. CCI Director Jacob Malcom is a member of the IPBES Policy Tools and Methodologies Task Force, which will be working in the coming years to better connect the science assessments with policymakers and policy outcomes. This places Defenders as a leader in shaping the intersection of conservation science and policy.

Responding to Climate Change and Expanding Renewable Energy

- Defenders contributed comprehensive comments and was joined by many environmental groups in opposing the administration's proposal to weaken the longstanding Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA. Defenders also submitted specific comments focused on the wildlife and habitat implications of the proposed changes, which would eliminate cumulative effects analysis and allow agencies to effectively ignore climate change. Defenders also submitted a petition with nearly 12,000 signatures from members and supporters opposing the draft regulations and several staff testified at a public hearing in DC in late February.
- In June, Defenders received formal endorsement from the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Oregon Natural Desert Association and Renewable Northwest, an influential clean energy advocacy group (which includes a lot of developers) for our Oregon Smart Siting Project. This project aims to develop voluntary state-wide renewable energy siting guidelines and best practices.

- In June, the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis released its recommendations for a congressional agenda to mitigate climate change and adapt to its inevitable impacts. The Committee included in its report many of the ideas and recommendations that Defenders had suggested, including a "National Landscape Conservation Strategy for Adaptation" and Endangered Species Climate Action Plans.
- Defenders made substantial progress this year on the Long Island Solar Roadmap project, which aims to accelerate smart development of mid-to large-scale solar power on low-impact sites on Long Island. The spatial analysis portion of the project has identified approximately 19.4 Gigawatts of low-impact solar potential, enough to power three million New York homes. The team has conducted a series of six strategy sessions in which stakeholders explored strategies to encourage low-impact solar development, reduce costs and improve access, equity and public support.
- Defenders is quickly building up our offshore wind energy program as the country is seeing the installation of the first turbines in federal waters. To coordinate scientific research, Defenders joined with others in the NGO community, wind developers, staff from Atlantic seaboard states and federal agency staff in creating the Regional Wildlife Science Entity for Atlantic Offshore Wind (RWSE). As a founding member, Defenders has been integral in determining the structure, mission and governance of RWSE to ensure that the NGO community has a strong voice at the table (equal representation in leadership as industry members) and enable RWSE to generate the best possible wildlife science to inform decision-making.

Building a Constituency to Defend Wildlife

- In February, Defenders hosted five “ranching with predators on the landscape” workshops in western Colorado. Our presenters (an Alberta rancher and a Montana rancher who successfully ranch with wolves and other predators, and a former Wildlife Services wolf trapper) described real-life experiences and techniques for successfully sharing the landscape with wolves. The workshops came on the heels of announcements that a pack of wolves was confirmed in the northwest corner of the state. Defenders continues to work with our partners on outreach efforts to Coloradans, now that the ballot initiative for wolf reintroduction to the state has officially passed.
- In March, Defenders’ national outreach program held a virtual grassroots lobby day with 18 activists including supporters, donors and students involved in our campus club initiative. Activists met with 23 congressional offices, elevating the extinction crisis through requests to fully fund the ESA, ensure removal of the sage-grouse rider in the FY2021 Interior appropriations bill and advocate for passage of the PAW & FIN Act to rescind the Trump administration’s rollbacks to the ESA.
- Defenders mobilized supporters in a day of action on April 20th, the 10th anniversary of BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil spill, urging the Secretary of the Interior to halt the MBTA rulemaking during the COVID-19 crisis. Members sent over 2,000 paper cranes in support of the MBTA to be used on social media and in congressional outreach.

- In August, Defenders' National Outreach team held virtual lobby meetings with ten representatives from four states: Arizona, Colorado, Maine and Pennsylvania. Sixteen activists, including dedicated youth activists and students with our campus club programs, met with their representatives to discuss supporting the Migratory Bird Protection Act (H.R. 5552) and cosponsoring the Polar Bear Cub Survival Act (H.R. 7876). Because H.R. 7876 was introduced in late July, many of the offices were unaware of the bill and heard about it for the first time from our activists. From those introductory meetings, three representatives committed to cosponsoring the bill.
- In August, Defenders conducted multiple bear awareness trainings in collaboration with the Washington State University (WSU) Extension, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Latino Outdoors. These virtual sessions about living with grizzly bears reached dozens of participants in both the Selkirk and North Cascades ecosystems, with each participant eligible to pick up Defenders-supplied bear spray cans from their local WSU Extension office.

2021 Priorities

Thanks to the hard work of our field teams, scientists, policy experts, lobbyists and lawyers, and the dedication of conservationists like you, we have made every moment of 2020 count. Together we blocked destructive congressional riders and amendments, overturned reckless anti-conservation initiatives and worked to establish lasting protections for wildlife and habitats during tremendous political upheaval. Through your generosity, commitment and dedication, Defenders has been able to stand against and prevent the truly stunning number of anti-wildlife measures we have faced during this current administration.

Now, as we move into 2021, Defenders is looking forward to working with President-elect Biden on the priorities and actions needed to safeguard America's extraordinary conservation legacy for all wildlife and people. The President-elect and Vice President-elect Harris assume office as the nation faces a surging climate crisis and an unprecedented biodiversity crisis. Defenders is looking forward with a sober awareness of the work ahead but with optimism and a focused determination to change the direction for wildlife.

We are facing these challenges by promoting pragmatic solutions to conservation problems through partnerships, data and technology; bolstering our fight for wildlife on the ground, in the courts and in the halls of Congress; ramping up our campaign to protect imperiled species habitat strongholds on federal public lands as part of the broader 30x30 campaign; restoring key laws and lands that we've lost under the Trump administration and further developing programs that will mobilize and motivate a growing constituency that cares about wildlife. Thank you for your dedication to Defenders' mission to protect native animals and plants in their natural communities.