

FUNDING WILDLIFE PROTECTIONS AND REJECTING HARMFUL RIDERS

Passed 224-189

SUMMARY

The House passed a four-bill FY 2021 appropriations package, including Interior and Environment and Agriculture appropriations, that provides funding increases for the Endangered Species Act and other crucial wildlife programs and eliminates a rider that prevents protections for the imperiled greater sage-grouse. *(July 24, 2020, Roll Call No. 166)*

BACKGROUND

Federal funding for environmental programs is vital to efforts in our nation to protect our irreplaceable natural heritage and to leave a clean, healthy and vibrant environment to our children. Work by federal wildlife agencies to protect imperiled species and stop illegal trafficking; efforts by land management agencies to properly manage our national wildlife refuges, parks, and forests and build resilience in the face of climate change; and actions by regulatory agencies to keep our air and water clean and stop toxic pollution all depend on adequate funding of their programs. Despite their importance, programs that protect our environment and natural resources have been crippled by draconian budgets in recent years. Must-pass funding bills have also become vehicles for riders – controversial policy provisions undermining environmental protections that proponents hope will ride along on the underlying bill.

The FY 2021 State-Foreign Operations, Agriculture, Military Construction-VA, and Interior-Environment appropriations package, H.R. 7608, would provide \$259.5 billion for four of the twelve FY 2021 appropriations bills, including \$65.9 billion for the State Department and related agencies, \$24 billion for the Agriculture Department and related agencies, \$115.5 billion for the Veterans Affairs Department, military construction, and related agencies, and \$36.8 billion for the Interior Department, Environmental Protection Agency, and related agencies.

The Interior and Environment portion of the bill restores cuts that had been made by President Trump's budget for a number of programs that benefit wildlife and habitat. The bill also eliminates anti-environmental riders that had been included in recent appropriations bills including a rider that prohibits the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) from considering protection for the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act. Sage-grouse numbers are declining across the West and the situation will only continue to worsen given that the Trump administration has rolled back many of the federal land use protections set in place after 2010 that were intended to reverse the bird's decline. Removal of the rider would ensure the FWS will have the tools to protect the species if needed. At the same time, the bill includes finely-crafted language that would hold the administration accountable for promises made

when Arctic National Wildlife Refuge fossil fuel leasing passed Congress in the tax package by requiring a minimum bid for drilling leases on the Refuge's irreplaceable coastal plain.

The Agriculture appropriations portion of the bill continued for a second year crucial new funding for USDA Wildlife Services to hire staff and to promote and implement effective nonlethal coexistence tools and strategies that help avoid and minimize potential conflicts between people and wildlife. As human communities expand and recovering wildlife species return to their historical ranges, conflicts between people and wildlife can pose a serious challenge to conservation and to human livelihoods. The innovative coexistence practices supported by this funding will both minimize conflicts and provide better outcomes for people and wildlife.

OUTCOME

On July 24, 2020, the House passed H.R. 7608, 224-189. "Yes" was the pro-conservation vote.