

FUNDING WILDLIFE PROTECTIONS AND REJECTING HARMFUL RIDERS

Passed 219-208

SUMMARY:

The House passed a seven-bill FY 2022 appropriations package that includes both Interior and Environment and Agriculture appropriations for important funding increases for the National Wildlife Refuge System, threatened and endangered species programs on multiple-purpose lands and a program to reduce human-wildlife conflicts. The package also eliminates a rider that prevents protections for the imperiled greater sage-grouse. *(July 29, 2021, Roll Call No. 247)*

BACKGROUND

Federal funding for environmental programs is vital to efforts to protect our irreplaceable natural heritage and to leave a clean, healthy and vibrant environment to our children. Efforts by federal agencies to protect imperiled species, stop illegal wildlife trafficking, properly manage our national wildlife refuges, parks and forests, build ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change and 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 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act, H.R. 4502, would have provided funding for seven of the 12 FY 2022 appropriations bills, including \$45.8 billion—a \$7.4 billion increase—for the Interior Department, Environmental Protection Agency and related agencies and \$26.6 billion—a \$2.8 billion increase—for the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and related agencies.

The Interior and Environment portion of the bill provided significant funding increases for a number of programs that benefit wildlife and habitat. For example, the bill would have provided a \$78 million increase for the National Wildlife Refuge System and a combined increase of well over \$100 million for key wildlife programs at the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. The bill also eliminated 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 imperiled greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act, even though sage-grouse numbers continue to decline and effective conservation of the bird is inextricably linked to the fate of the Sagebrush Sea and the more than 350 other declining species that depend on it. Removal of the rider would have ensured that FWS would have had the tools to protect the species if needed.

The Agriculture appropriations portion of the bill continued crucial new funding for a third year, increasing it by \$3.3 million or more than 300 percent, 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 29, 2021, the House passed H.R. 4502, 219-208. “Yea” was the pro-conservation vote. Subsequently, the final FY 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act, H.R. 2471, which was passed by both the House and Senate and signed by the president, significantly reduced most of the funding increases that had been provided in the initial House bill and reinstated the sage-grouse rider.