Arizona Wildlife Federation * Arkansas Wildlife Federation * Planning and Conservation League
Colorado Wildlife Federation * Connecticut Forest & Park Association * Delaware Nature Society
Florida Wildlife Federation * Georgia Wildlife Federation * Conservation Council for Hawaii
Idaho Wildlife Federation * Prairie Rivers Network * Iowa Wildlife Federation * Kansas Wildlife Federation
Louisiana Wildlife Federation * Natural Resources Council of Maine * Environmental League of Massachusetts
Minnesota Conservation Federation * Mississippi Wildlife Federation * Montana Wildlife Federation
Nebraska Wildlife Federation * Nevada Wildlife Federation * New Jersey Audubon Society
New Mexico Wildlife Federation * Environmental Advocates of New York * North Carolina Wildlife Federation
Association of Northwest Steelheaders * Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future
Sociedad Ornitológica Puertorriqueña * Environment Council of Rhode Island
South Carolina Wildlife Federation * South Dakota Wildlife Federation * Vermont Natural Resources Council
Virginia Conservation Network * Virgin Islands Conservation Society * Washington Wildlife Federation
West Virginia Rivers Coalition * Wyoming Wildlife Federation

July 25, 2011

Dear Representatives:

As affiliate partners of the National Wildlife Federation, we represent dedicated conservationists from all walks of life and political stripes, from hunters and anglers to backyard gardeners, nature enthusiasts and environmental advocates. What we have in common is a deep commitment to protect wildlife habitat and to ensure clean air and water for every American. Because of that commitment, we reject the Interior and Environment FY 2012 Appropriations bill that was recently passed by the House Appropriations Committee. The bill includes significant cuts to the conservation programs that protect America's resources, as well as numerous policy riders that threaten America's environmental conservation legacy.

Conservation has long enjoyed strong, bipartisan support in Congress. Unfortunately, the FY 12 Interior Appropriations bill amounts to a radical departure from the longstanding national commitment to making the air we breathe and the water we drink cleaner and safer. The bill dramatically slashes funding for our nation's most important wildlife conservation and habitat restoration programs while blocking enforcement of several bedrock public health and environmental laws.

One rider in the bill explicitly extends loopholes in the Clean Water Act that jeopardize drinking water for 117 million Americans and handed over 20 million acres of wetlands and prime wildlife habitat to polluters and developers. The Interior Appropriations bill also bans the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from working to close these loopholes, which threaten wetlands such as those in the Prairie Pothole Region—the breeding grounds for the majority of North America's ducks. Many other water riders included in the bill would further weaken the Clean Water Act and block EPA efforts to protect America's waters.

Several riders would also weaken the Clean Air Act and force the EPA to turn a blind eye to carbon dioxide pollution. Carbon dioxide is a heat-trapping gas that is building up rapidly in our atmosphere and destabilizing the climate systems that nurture fish and wildlife, yet this bill included a rider attacking the authority of the EPA to limit carbon pollution from stationary sources, as well an amendment to block the EPA from finalizing fuel efficiency standards for light-duty automobiles. Other damaging clean air policy riders included in the bill would limit EPA's ability to implement limits on toxic air pollution and would give utilities and offshore oil drillers a free pass to foul our nation's air and water. In addition to saving over 160,000 lives a year the Clean Air Act protects our trout streams from acid rain, our lakes from toxic mercury pollution, and our forests from tree killing smog, yet this bill would undermine this important law.

A particularly draconian funding limitation in the bill would prevent the Fish and Wildlife Service from using funds to list new species under the Endangered Species Act. Additionally, the bill prevents the Service from using funds to designate critical habitat for species that have already been listed as threatened or endangered. This funding moratorium paralyzes the Fish and Wildlife Service in its attempts to move forward on a backlog of over 250 candidate species in need of listing and protection, and prevents the Service from performing fundamental management activities for listed species.

The Interior Appropriations bill also includes severe cuts to some of the America's most important wildlife and clean energy programs, including:

- A reduction of $2.1 billion below last year's funding level, $3.8 billion below the President's budget request, and $468 below the fiscal year 2006 levels
- A total cut to climate change programs of $83 million (22%) from FY 2011 levels
- A decrease in land acquisition funding of $239 million (79%)
- An 80% cut ($61.8 million) to the Land and Water Conservation Fund
- A 7.5% cut ($455.3 million) to the National Wildlife Refuge System
- A $12 million cut to the National Landscape Conservation System
- A 21% cut ($315 million) to the US Fish and Wildlife Service budget
- A 64 % cut ($40 million) to the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program
- A 58% decrease in funding for the North American Wetland Conservation Act
- A 95% decrease in funding for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund
- The elimination of funding for the National Environmental Education Act, the nation's only federal law committed to environmental education

America's investment in wildlife is not to blame for the budget problems we face today. Over the past 30 years, America's investment in parks, wildlife, clean water, and clean air has fallen from 1.7% of federal spending to 0.6% of federal spending. This includes the full budgets for the Department of Interior and EPA. And the payoff for this tiny sliver of overall federal spending is enormous: programs implemented by Department of Interior and EPA alone generate 3 million jobs in communities throughout America. A serious effort to address the deficit would tackle the $4 billion in annual subsidies for oil and gas corporations and a host of other tax breaks and subsidies for big polluters.

Ensuring clean air, clean water and abundant wildlife is not a discretionary and wasteful function of government but a basic and core value that Americans believe in. We ask you to vote against the Interior Appropriations bill when it comes to a vote in the full House, to oppose its anti-environmental and anti-American riders and to work to restore funding for wildlife conservation, natural resource protection and environmental restoration programs that benefit all families and communities. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tom Mackin, President
Arizona Wildlife Federation

Bruce Reznik, Executive Director
Planning and Conservation League (California)

Wayne Shewmake, President
Arkansas Wildlife Federation

Suzanne O'Neill, Executive Director
Colorado Wildlife Federation

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director
Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Michael E. Riska, Executive Director
Delaware Nature Society

Manley Fuller, President
Florida Wildlife Federation

Jerry McCollum, President & CEO
Georgia Wildlife Federation

Marjorie Ziegler, Executive Director
Conservation Council for Hawaii

Rob Fraser, President
Idaho Wildlife Federation

Glynnis Collins, Executive Director
Prairie Rivers Network (Illinois)

Joe Wilkinson, President
Iowa Wildlife Federation

Don Snider, President
Kansas Wildlife Federation

Ken Dancak, President
Louisiana Wildlife Federation

Lisa Pohlmann, Executive Director
Natural Resources Council of Maine

George Bachrach, President
Environmental League of Massachusetts

Gary Botzek, Executive Director
Minnesota Conservation Federation

Cathy Shropshire, Executive Director
Mississippi Wildlife Federation

Craig Sharpe, Executive Director
Montana Wildlife Federation

Duane Hovorka, Executive Director
Nebraska Wildlife Federation

Robert Gaudet, President
Nevada Wildlife Federation

Eric Stiles, Chief Operating Officer
New Jersey Audubon Society

Jeremy Vesbach, Executive Director
New Mexico Wildlife Federation

David Gahl, Policy Director
Environmental Advocates of
New York

Tim Gestwicki, Executive Director
North Carolina Wildlife Federation

Russell Bassett, Executive Director
Association of Northwest Steelheaders (Oregon)

Jan Jarrett, President & CEO
Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future

Alcides L. Morales Pérez, President
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Walt Gasson, Executive Director
Wyoming Wildlife Federation