

Our identity — who we are and the country we envision for future generations — is inextricably linked to wildlife. From the majesty of the bald eagle to the wonder of trout spawning in Wyoming's high-country streams to everyday encounters with mule deer, foxes, and greater sage-grouse wildlife inspire us and remind us of America's unbridled potential.

A bi-partisan opportunity exists for Congress to act now to invest in our outdoor heritage and to proactively conserve wildlife before they need emergency room treatment.

What is the status of our wildlife across the board? Well, the numbers are stunning. More than 12,000 species face significant challenges and are in urgent need of conservation attention, according to state wildlife agencies. We're not just talking about obscure species you've never heard of. Backyard icons like monarch butterflies, fireflies and frogs are disappearing. More than 30 percent of bird species and 40 percent of freshwater fish species in North America are in need of urgent conservation action. The need touches every community, with species as varied as peregrine falcons, bumblebees, turtles and cutthroat trout in trouble.

Here at home, Wyoming Game and Fish Department has identified 229 species as being at risk or needing conservation attention, including Snake River cutthroat trout, ferruginous hawks and moose.

Wildlife and healthy lands and waters support Main Street businesses in Wyoming and across the country. Outdoor recreation generates \$5.6 billion annually and supports 50,000 direct jobs in Wyoming. Wildlife-focused recreation is a significant slice of that pie, with Americans spending \$140 billion dollars on hunting, fishing, bird watching, and other wildlife-related recreation each year.

The good news is that in this era of partisan gridlock, conservation is one area where Republicans and Democrats can still find common ground.

U.S. Representatives Jeff Fortenberry, R-Nebr., and Debbie Dingell, D-Mich., have introduced the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, which would direct \$1.3 billion in existing revenue from oil and gas activities on federal lands and waters towards state-led efforts to recover species at risk. This bill has close to 100 co-sponsors from both parties and the Senate is exploring a similar proposal.

The House Committee on Natural Resources has its eye on this same pot of money—the existing oil and gas revenue that usually generates somewhere between \$5 and \$10 billion annually. The Natural Resources Committee recently worked out a tentative bipartisan agreement to use some of this money to permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund and to address the maintenance backlog in our national parks and other public lands. These issues need to be addressed and I fully support this agreement.

Congress should make a good thing even better by including the Recovering America's Wildlife Act and fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund in the final deal.

By investing in wildlife, their habitats, and public lands infrastructure, Congress will ensure that America's wildlife heritage will endure for the benefit of current and future generations. A bipartisan deal along these lines would be a historic action, one that would be remembered for generations.

Our senators and representatives should seize this opportunity to act. Wyoming's economy and our way of life benefits from robust populations of wildlife, healthy habitats and accessible parks where we can enjoy our natural heritage.

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