

March 24, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McCarthy,

As you begin to consider additional larger stimulus packages for the U.S. economy to help individual Americans, small businesses, and others deal with the consequences of the deadly coronavirus, or COVID-19, we urge you to also consider the root causes of this emerging zoonotic virus and others like it — the trade of wildlife and habitat destruction in the United States and around the world.

Clearly, we hope that any stimulus package puts the needs of ordinary people first and foremost. The impacts of the coronavirus pandemic are being felt now and will continue in unforeseen ways for months and possibly years to come. Legislative provisions that bailout corporations and reward corporate executives are morally wrong and should not be included. Strong labor protections and direct payroll assistance to workers are critical, as is requiring employers to honor existing commitments for health care, pensions and other vital assistance.

Furthermore, we ask that Congress use this opportunity to address the root causes of the problem. Scientists estimate that 60% of known infectious diseases in people can be transmitted from animals, and 75% of emerging infectious diseases originate in wildlife.<sup>1</sup> Emerging zoonotic diseases have quadrupled in the last 50 years, mostly in tropical regions. Like the 2003 SARS epidemic and Ebola, COVID-19 is just the latest zoonotic disease to emerge that has its roots in the rampant habitat loss occurring around the world and the burgeoning wildlife trade. Global pandemics will likely continue and even escalate if action isn't taken. This Congress has the opportunity to not only address the crisis but reestablish the United States as a global leader in wildlife conservation and the protection of habitat.

Following the 2008 financial crisis, Congress worked to strengthen the economy and reform key regulatory safeguards to prevent similar crises in the future. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided funding across the federal government — including for our environment, public lands and wildlife — to boost the economy. While the coronavirus pandemic is a far different type of crisis, we hope that Congress will act to make these types of pandemics less likely in the future.

---

<sup>1</sup> See, Centers for Disease Control. Zoonotic Diseases <https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/zoonotic-diseases.html>

Thus, we request that 1% of the total funds in future stimulus packages address habitat loss, legal and illegal wildlife trade, and the protection of biological diversity here and around the world. Adding law enforcement staff, inspectors at our ports of entry, and building global capacity to address the extinction crisis are all needed if we hope to make future pandemics less likely to occur in the first place.

The current pandemic is not only a public health and economic crisis but a conservation crisis as well. It is a sobering demonstration of the consequences of the natural world unraveling. We hope that Congress invests what is needed to help combat this pandemic and reflect on the lessons learned to help avert future catastrophes.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity  
Advocates for Snake Preservation  
Amazon Watch  
Animal Legal Defense Fund  
Animals & Society Institute  
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.  
Animas Valley Institute  
Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment  
Basin and Range Watch  
Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT)  
Beyond Nuclear  
Big Blackfoot Riverkeeper, Inc.  
Black Warrior Riverkeeper  
Boulder Rights of Nature, Inc.  
California Wildlife Foundation  
Center for Large Landscape Conservation  
Central Savannah River Land Trust  
Certified Naturally Grown  
Christian Council of Delmarva  
Ciudadanos Del Karso  
Coast Range Association  
Conservation Congress  
Conservation Council For Hawaii  
Conservation Law Foundation  
Diversity Inventory Group  
Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research  
Eco-Eating  
Endangered small animal Conservation fund  
Endangered Species Coalition  
Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)  
Food Democracy Now!  
Footloose Montana  
Foundation Earth

Friends For Environmental Justice  
Friends of Animals  
Friends of Blackwater, Inc.  
Friends of the WI Wolf & Wildlife  
Fund for Wild Nature  
GARDEN, Inc.  
Geos Institute  
Gila Resources Information Project  
Global Justice Ecology Project  
Golden Gate Raptor Observatory  
Grand Canyon Trust  
Great Lakes Wildlife Alliance  
Great Old Broads for Wilderness  
Greater Hells Canyon Council  
GreenFaith  
Greenpeace USA  
inNative  
Kentucky Waterways Alliance  
Kickapoo Peace Circle  
Kiesha's Preserve  
LEGACY - The Landscape Connection  
Maricopa Audubon Society  
Maryland Ornithological Society  
Montgomery Bird Club Inc.  
National Wolfwatcher Coalition  
Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility  
New Mexico Audubon Council  
New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light  
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems  
Northern Jaguar Project  
Northwest Environmental Advocates  
Ocean Preservation Society  
Oregon Wild  
Predator Defense  
Project Coyote  
Public Lands Project  
PureForm Global, Inc.  
Raptors Are The Solution  
Save Our Sky Blue Waters  
Save The Colorado  
SAVE THE FROGS!  
Save the Manatee Club  
Save the Pine Bush  
Sequoia ForestKeeper®  
Seventh Generation Advisors  
Sheep Mountain Alliance

Social Justice Commission (Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts)  
Southwest Environmental Center  
Speak Up For Wildlife Foundation  
Texas Drought Project  
The Cloud Foundation  
The Conservation Angler  
The Habitat Institute  
The Interfaith Council for the Protection of Animals & Nature  
The Lands Council  
Tuolumne River Trust  
Turtle Island Restoration Network  
Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition  
Utah Native Plant Society  
Ventana Wilderness Alliance  
Western Environmental Law Center  
Western Watersheds Project  
Western Nebraska Resources Council  
WILD Foundation  
Wild Horse Education  
Wild Nature Institute  
Wild Virginia  
WildEarth Guardians  
Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation  
WildWest Institute  
[www.All-Creatures.org](http://www.All-Creatures.org)  
Xun Biosphere Project  
Yellowstone to Unitas Connection