

April 2, 2019

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol H-305
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol H-305
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Subcommittee Chairman Bishop, and Subcommittee Ranking Member Fortenberry:

On behalf of our organizations and millions of members, we request that you substantially increase the amount of funding spent on key wildlife conservation, including the conservation of monarch butterflies to \$100 million per year in Fiscal Year 2020. Once a familiar sight, today the monarch's future is very much in doubt. Populations have fallen by more than 80 percent over the past 20 years, and scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey estimate that there is nearly a 60 percent chance the monarch's spectacular, multigenerational migration in the eastern half of the country could completely collapse within the next 20 years.¹ More alarmingly, the western population that winters in California has collapsed by nearly 99.4 percent, and could disappear in a few short years.

The monarch butterfly has been decreasing towards extinction due to landscape-scale threats from pesticides, development, and global climate change. Although illegal logging and severe weather have contributed to the decline, the large-scale use of herbicides that destroy milkweed—the monarch caterpillar's sole host plant and only food source during its caterpillar stage—is a driver of the butterfly's decline. Milkweed has decreased by 21 percent in the U.S. between 1995 and 2013, and nearly 165 million total acres of milkweed have been lost to pesticide-intensive agriculture and development.² Reversing that trend by actively restoring milkweed and other pollinator habitat is critical to ensure the long-term survival of the monarch butterfly.

While the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has taken some initial steps toward slowing the monarch's decline—including the implementation of the Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project—monarchs desperately need more funding to ensure their long-term survival. The requested increased level of funding would cover the cost of restoring one million acres of milkweed and pollinator habitat per year so that the butterfly is resilient to threats from habitat loss, pesticides, severe weather, and

¹ See Semmens, et al., *Quasi-extinction risk and population targets for the Eastern, migratory population of monarch butterflies (Danaus plexippus)*. Scientific Reports (2016), 6, p.23265. available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/srep23265>

² See Flockhart et al., *Unravelling the annual cycle in a migratory animal: breeding-season habitat loss drives population declines in monarch butterflies*, Journal of Animal Ecology (2014) available at: <http://norrislab.ca/wp-content/uploads/Flockhart-et-al.-In-press.pdf>

climate change.³

The eastern population of monarch butterflies got a temporary reprieve this year as the annual count of butterflies overwintering in Mexico showed an increase of 144 percent from last year's count, reaching its highest population numbers since 2006 due to good weather in the spring and summer. Unfortunately, one good year will not save the monarch butterfly. In fact, an unusually warm winter in Mexico, likely caused by climate change, has triggered an earlier-than-normal migration. Butterflies began arriving in the United States at the beginning of March, but milkweed resources are scarce in early spring.

This premature migration could erase last year's gains and illustrates just how fragile the migration remains in light of climate change. Without more milkweed and pollinator habitat to guarantee robust monarch populations, the migratory phenomenon is still in grave danger.

The western population of monarchs—which migrate from states west of the Rocky Mountains and overwinter on the coast of California—is already at the brink of extinction. An estimated 4.5 million monarchs once overwintered along the Pacific coast. Due to prolonged drought in the west and loss of milkweed and pollinator habitat, the population reached a historic low of only 28,429 butterflies in 2018, a decline of about 86 percent from the previous year.⁴ The western monarch migration is now at imminent risk of collapsing completely if urgent action isn't taken.

Restoring the monarch butterfly and its habitat needs an even greater commitment from Congress. The 2015 *National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators* set a short-term goal of 225 million butterflies at the overwintering locations in Mexico occupying an area of 15 acres (6 hectares). This is the bare minimum needed to avoid extinction and is not a long-term goal for stability. The monarch butterfly population is still substantially lower than the population in the early 1990s, which was nearly a billion monarch butterflies and 10 hectares of overwintering forest cover. Without substantial investments in the monarch's conservation, one bad storm or strange climate event could result in migratory collapse.

Now more than ever, effective action is needed to address the plight of the monarch butterfly before it is too late. We thank you for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
Natural Resources Defense Council
Alaska Community Action on Toxics
Alaska's Big Village Network
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Protection League of New Jersey
Animal Welfare Institute
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.
Animas Valley Institute
Association for the Tree of Life
Association of Zoos and Aquariums

³ According to Monarch Watch, the costs of restoration and maintenance of milkweeds and nectar plants ranges from \$100-\$1000 per acre.

⁴ See Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, *Record Low Number of Overwintering Monarch Butterflies in California* (Jan. 2017), available at: <https://xerces.org/2019/01/17/record-low-overwintering-monarchs-in-california/>.

Battle Creek Alliance & Defiance Canyon Raptor Rescue
Bedford County Bird and Nature Club
Bird Conservation Network
Born Free USA
Boulder County Audubon Society, Colorado
Butterfly Farms.org
California Chaparral Institute
Californians for Alternatives to Toxics
Center for Food Safety
Citizens' Climate Lobby
Ciudadanos Del Karso
Climate Law & Policy Project
Delaware Ecumenical Council on Children and Families
Dolphin Connection
Earthjustice
Eco-Eating
Eco-Justice Collaborative
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin
Environmental Defense Fund (EDF)
Environmental Protection Information Center
Field Museum of Natural History Chicago
Food & Water Watch
Food Democracy Now!
Food Empowerment Project
Friends of the Earth
Fund for Wild Nature
Georgia ForestWatch
Geos Institute
Global Justice Ecology
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Greenpeace U.S.
Heartwood
Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History
Hoosier Environmental Council
Howard County Bird Club
Howling For Wolves
Inland Ocean Coalition
Juniata Valley Audubon Society
Kentucky Waterways Alliance
KickapooPeaceCircle
Klamath Forest Alliance
Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
League of Humane Voters of New Jersey
Lehigh Valley Audubon Society
Living Rivers & Colorado Riverkeeper
Los Padres ForestWatch
Louisiana Audubon Council

Madison Audubon Society
Maryland Ornithological Societ
Mass Audubon
Montgomery Bird Club
MountainTrue
NC WARN
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems
Northern Jaguar Project
Northwest Environmental Advocates
Occidental Arts and Ecology Center
Oregon Natural Desert Association
Pesticide Free Zone
Predator Defense
Project Soliton
Raptor Services, LLC
Raptors Are The Solution
Rocky Mountain Wild
San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society
San Francisco Baykeeper
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
Save Our Allegheny Ridges
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Sierra Club
Spirit of the Sage Council
Sustainable Arizona
Tennessee Chapter Sierra Club
The Canary Coalition
The Cougar Fund
The Goodell Project
The Monarch Alliance
The Rewilding Institute
The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
Toxic Free NC
Tuolumne River Trust
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition
Urban Bird Foundation
Ventana Wilderness Alliance
Vermont Center for Ecostudies
Wasatch Climate and Air Coalition
Western Watersheds Project
WildEarth Guardians
WilderUtopia
Xun Biosphere Project