

December 3, 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

Re: Right Whale Approaching Imminent Extinction

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

We request that you include \$100 million in emergency funding for the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale, with a substantial portion of this funding to be used towards ramping up the deployment of “ropeless” or “pop-up” fishing gear. The right whale is one of the most endangered species on the planet, and the population has now reached crisis status. These iconic whales desperately need additional recovery funding to prevent them from becoming extinct.

Just last month, scientists announced that there are only about 360 right whales remaining—down roughly 50 individuals from last year—with about 70 breeding females. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature this year reclassified the whale to “critically imperiled” status—one step away from extinction. Since 2017, at least 45 right whales have been killed or seriously injured in an ongoing unusual mortality event unprecedented in modern times. Right whales are declining so quickly that scientists now predict the species could be functionally extinct by 2040 if current trends continue.

While the right whale faces many threats, entanglements in fishing gear remains one of the largest threats to the whales’ survival. When right whales get entangled in commercial fishing gear, they can drown or drag the gear for weeks or months, for hundreds or even thousands of miles, until they ultimately succumb to starvation, infections, dehydration, or exhaustion. Those that survive are often permanently injured, interfering with breathing, feeding, and reproduction.

“Ropeless” fishing gear eliminates unattended vertical fishing line in the water column, substantially reducing the risk of entanglements in vertical lines and the attendant serious injuries, mortalities, and sub-lethal impacts these entanglements cause. This type of gear is already being deployed by fisherman around the world, including in waters off the U.S. East and West coasts, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in Canada, and in Australia.

If Congress continues to underfund right whale recovery, there is a very real prospect of the species going extinct in the next decade or two. The small funding increases that Congress has provided in past appropriations bills, while appreciated, are wholly insufficient to save the right whale from slipping further towards extinction, let alone putting it on the path to recovery. To

truly save the right whale from further decline, Congress must commit to taking bold, meaningful action before it's too late.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
Alaska Clean Water Advocacy
All-Creatures.org
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Protection League of New Jersey
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.
Animas Valley Institute
Audubon Society of Central Arkansas
Battle Creek Alliance/Defiance Canyon Raptor Rescue
Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT)
Beyond Pesticides
Boulder Rights of Nature, Inc.
California Wildlife Foundation
Ciudadanos Del Karso
Conservation Council For Hawaii
Conservation Law Foundation
Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society
Dolphin Connection
Earth Path Sanctuary
Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research
Eco-Eating
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Defense Center
Gotham Whale
Having Kids, Inc.
Heartwood
Howling For Wolves
Humane Society Legislative Fund
In Defense of Animals
In the Shadow of the Wolf
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Iowa Environmental Council
Justice for Wolves
Living Rivers & Colorado Riverkeeper
Malama Makua
Mass Audubon
Massachusetts Forest Watch
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems
Northwest Environmental Advocates
NY4WHALES

Oceanic Preservation Society
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility
Public Lands Project
Raptors Are The Solution
Rocky Mountain Wild
San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
Save the Manatee Club
Sequoia ForestKeeper®
South Florida Wildlands Association
The Humane Society of the United States
The Lands Council
Toxic Free NC
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Whale and Dolphin Conservation
Wildcoast
Wyoming Untrapped

Cc:

The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chairwoman, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations