



P.O. Box 216 Klamath Falls, Oregon 97601

Protecting Water for Western Irrigated Agriculture

April 4, 2017

The Honorable John Barrasso
United States Senate
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Barrasso:

On behalf of the Family Farm Alliance (Alliance), we write to express our support for your “Wildlife Innovation and Longevity Driver Act”, or “WILD Act”. This important legislation would reauthorize the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and certain wildlife conservation funds, establish prize competitions relating to the prevention of wildlife poaching and trafficking, and authorize wildlife conservation, the management of invasive species, and the protection of endangered species.

The Alliance is a grassroots organization of family farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts and allied industries in 16 Western states. The Alliance is focused on one mission: To ensure the availability of reliable, affordable irrigation water supplies to Western farmers and ranchers. Notably, the Alliance is on record for consistently supporting the efforts a program in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) called “Partners for Fish and Wildlife” (“Partners Program”) that helps to fund habitat work on private lands. Our members also have strong concerns regarding the need to properly manage invasive species with priority.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife

The Partners Program demonstrates a workable process to reconcile inherent conflicts brought about by multiple demands. This program already has the infrastructure and relationships with landowners to get effective habitat work done for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed and candidate species. They have projects on the ground all over the country and are doing yeoman’s work to preserve habitat for toads in Nevada, Sage Grouse in Wyoming, and the Mountain Plover in Colorado, to name just a few success stories.

The Partners program is successful because it employs experts who are on the ground, working with landowners, instead of crafting mandates via biological opinions and the corresponding ‘reasonable and prudent alternatives’ (RPAs) from far-removed government offices. These federal

officials recognize that if a species exists and thrives on a property—public or private—the practices that currently occur on that property will not harm and could even possibly protect that species. They learn to recognize, for example, that sage grouse are vulnerable to predators, and that areas where ranchers run sheep tend to have heavy predator control. They take the time to respect the observations of local landowners, who every day see thriving sage grouse populations on their lambing areas. Working with landowners, they gain an understanding and shared belief that the predator control that takes place on private lambing grounds has helped to keep the sage grouse in those areas healthy.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife is uniquely positioned to fulfill the direction of the ESA for the USFWS to manage threatened and endangered species. We strongly support the provisions of the WILD Act that amend Section 5 of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act (16 U.S.C. 3774) by increasing funding for the Partners Program from \$75 million to \$100 million for each of fiscal years 2018 through 2022.

Protection of Water and Wildlife from Invasive Species

Title II of the WILD Act includes important provisions intended to protect water and wildlife from invasive species. The Alliance for nearly a decade has supported administrative and legislative actions and funding for biological controls, mitigation management, and elimination of invasive species, including, but not limited to, quagga mussels and striped bass. In places like California's Bay-Delta, there is a critical need to reduce and remove invasive vegetation and predator fish species in the Delta that adversely affect water supply operations and the health of ecosystems. In other parts of California, predation of ESA-protected fish like salmon by non-native fish needs to be controlled.

In the Colorado River Basin, there is also an important need to balance invasive removal efforts with an emphasis on restoration of native plants and the river processes that sustain them. We are hopeful that Title II of the WILD Act will increase and coordinate the removal of invasive plants that negatively impact the natural water cycle and native plant and animal endangered species (examples are tamarisk/salt cedar, Russian Olive, Golden Algae, and other phreatophytes).

Title II protects water and wildlife from invasive species. It requires that specified federal agencies plan and carry out activities on land they directly manage to protect water and wildlife by controlling and managing invasive species. It requires those federal agencies to implement strategic invasive species programs, to prioritize the least-costly methods for controlling and managing invasive species, and to allocate not less than 75 percent of funding for on-the-ground control and management of invasive species. We urge that this program provide opportunities for the Bureau of Reclamation's water and power customers to work in partnership with Reclamation in all aspects of program implementation.

Wildlife Conservation and Prize Competitions

Title III of the WILD Act – “Wildlife Conservation”- and Title IV – “Prize Competitions” address issues that are outside the scope of our organization’s mission. Therefore, we will not address those components of the legislation in this letter.

Conclusion

This bill takes an important step towards prioritizing the Partners Program and addressing the critical challenges Western water users face regarding invasive species management. We strongly support Titles I and II of the WILD Act, which are issues of great importance to our Western farmers, ranchers and water agencies.

I encourage you or your staff to contact Dan Keppen at (541)-892-6244 if you have any questions regarding this letter.

Sincerely,



Patrick O'Toole
President



Dan Keppen
Executive Director