February 27, 2018

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Hoeven and Ranking Members Leahy and Merkley:

Wildlife causes more than $12.8 billion in damage each year to natural resources, public infrastructures, private property and agriculture. USDA Wildlife Services (WS) works to prevent, minimize or manage this damage and to protect human health and safety from conflicts with wildlife. Wildlife damage to U.S. livestock, aquaculture, small grains, fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products has been estimated to reach nearly $1 billion annually. Wildlife predators cause more than $178 million in death loss to livestock; field crop losses due to wildlife total $619 million annually; losses to vegetables, fruits and nuts total $146 million annually; and 70 percent of catfish farmers incur wildlife-related damage resulting in losses of $10 to $13 million annually from double-crested cormorants in Mississippi alone. As a result, WS is an essential program to U.S. agriculture.

The spread of wildlife-borne diseases to humans, livestock and other wildlife is a growing concern. WS monitors and manages pests and diseases in the United States. WS is often the first line of defense in reducing and eliminating diseases such as the West Nile virus, avian influenza, pandemic H1N1, chronic wasting disease, pseudo rabies, bubonic plague, Hantavirus, Lyme disease, bovine tuberculosis and rabies. In fact, rabies-associated costs range from $300 to $450 million annually in the United States primarily for pet vaccinations, education, diagnostics, post-exposure treatment and case investigations. In fiscal year (FY) 2017, WS collected more than 59,000 samples in their efforts to combat and eradicate wildlife disease with the majority of these directed at highly pathogenic avian influenza surveillance. WS also prevents entry of and controls invasive species such as feral swine, nutria, the brown tree snake, and the European starling. Feral swine are a subject of increasing concern as potential carriers or catalysts for a variety of diseases. It is estimated that there are more than 6 million feral swine in at least 39 states and while initial damage estimates were greater than $1.5 billion per year, more recent reports suggest that figure is more likely between $2 and $2.5 billion annually with more than $800 million of damage to agriculture resources.

In FY2017 alone, WS conducted 70,902 technical assistance projects (a 5% increase over FY 2016 figures) to reduce wildlife damage to property in urban, suburban and rural locations across the country, which include homes, schools, industrial facilities, roads, bridges, airports and airport runways, dams and electrical and water systems. One example of this work is WS efforts in reducing deer collisions with automobiles. More than 1.5 million deer-vehicle collisions occur each year, injuring tens of thousands of people, killing dozens, and causing more than $4 billion in damage. In addition, WS works to protect wetlands habitat, riparian habitat, tidal marsh and timber from a variety of pest species including feral hogs and nutria, as well as the destruction that beaver can cause.
Protection of natural resources is a growing need for WS. Last year, WS invested resources in conservation of game species including mule deer, bighorn sheep, antelope and waterfowl in eight states. Also in FY2017, WS spent $9.8 million for cooperative work with federal and state agencies to protect and assist 187 threatened or endangered species in 40 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In more than 95 percent of the projects, local threatened and endangered species either increased or remained stable.

Nearly 180,000 wildlife strikes with civil aviation have been reported since WS began keeping records in 1990. In 2015, there were more than 21,000 wildlife collisions with civil and military aircraft reported costing the total U.S. aviation industry more than $6 billion since 1990. WS provided direct services at 421 airports in FY2017 including population management through harassment, habitat modification or removal. Technical assistance, such as initial consultations and wildlife hazard assessments, was provided at 864 airports across the country. Through the process, WS trained more than 5,097 non-WS personnel at 406 airports to prevent or minimize the impact of wildlife strikes.

As the “Miracle on the Hudson” demonstrated in 2009, the management of wildlife hazards on and near our nation’s airports is a critical safety priority. WS provides valuable support to the aviation community in addressing these hazards. From its assistance in preparing FAA-required wildlife hazard assessments to its help with managing hazardous wildlife populations, WS staff ensure that U.S. airports both meet the regulatory obligations under 14 CFR Part 139 and reduce the safety risks associated with aircraft wildlife strikes. WS also assists the FAA in monitoring national trends regarding wildlife populations and the hazards they pose to aviation. At a time when airports are facing significantly expanded wildlife hazard management requirements through recently issued FAA Advisory Circulars and grant assurance modifications, its role will be even more critical to the aviation community going forward.

It has been WS’s cooperative nature that has allowed it to accomplish all of the above listed programs and has made it the most cost effective and efficient program in the federal government in the areas of wildlife damage management and public health and safety. In FY2017, WS had more than 4,600 cooperative agreements. WS cooperators include agriculture, forestry, private industry, state wildlife agencies, state departments of health, state departments of agriculture, schools, universities, counties, local governments, Indian nations, homeowner associations, conservation groups and others that, together with WS, mitigate the damage and dangers that public wildlife can inflict.

Chairmen Cochran and Hoeven and Ranking Members Leahy and Merkley, we appreciate your demonstrated leadership and strong support of this essential program. Our organizations are committed to working with you to strengthen WS resources and to ensure a continued federal partnership in the responsible management of our nation’s wildlife.
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Nebraska State Grange
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Nevada Department of Agriculture
Nevada Farm Bureau Federation
Nevada Rangeland Resources Commission
Nevada State Grazing Board Central Committee
Nevada Wool Growers Association
New Hampshire Sheep and Wool Growers Association
New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association
New Mexico Department of Agriculture
New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau
New Mexico Federal Lands Council
New Mexico Trappers Association
New Mexico Wool Growers, Inc
North Carolina Sheep Producers Association
North Dakota Lamb and Wool Producers Association
North Dakota Stockmen's Association
North Dakota Department of Agriculture
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Northeast States Association for Agricultural Stewardship
Ohio Cattlemen's Association
Ohio Farm Bureau Federation
Ohio Sheep Improvement Association
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Oregon Cattlemen's Association
Oregon Dairy Farmers Association
Oregon Farm Bureau Federation
Oregon Forest Industries Council
Oregon Outdoor Council
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Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
Pennsylvania Sheep and Wool Growers Association
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South Carolina Sheep Industries Association
South Dakota Cattlemen's Association
South Dakota Sheep Growers Association
South East Dairy Farmers Association
Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife Idaho

Tennessee Cattlemen’s Association
Tennessee Sheep Producers Association
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Texas Cattle Feeders Association
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Texas Sheep and Goat Predator Management Board
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The Council of State Governments – Midwest
The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
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Utah Cattlemen's Association
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