March 30, 2021

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Chairwoman
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Merkley, Chairwoman Pingree and Ranking Members Murkowski and Joyce:

We write to thank you for providing fiscal year (FY) 2021 funding totaling $55 million for the modernization of the US Geological Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) located in Madison, Wisconsin. The NWHC is unique because it is the only national center dedicated to wildlife disease detection, control, and prevention throughout the United States. We hope to work with the Subcommittee to secure the **remaining $76 million in no-year funding for FY 2022 that is needed to implement the full modernization of this national asset.**

The NWHC is the nation's only federal BSL-3 facility exclusively dedicated to scientific investigation and research on wildlife diseases that threaten human, animal, and environmental health. Through a comprehensive program involving biomedical and ecological expertise and capabilities, the NWHC is a world leader in developing science-based solutions to some of the most deadly wildlife diseases including avian influenza, white nose syndrome of bats, and other emerging diseases that have devastated wildlife populations around the world and pose significant threats to our food supply and public health. For example, the NWHC was the first to detect the Asian strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza in waterfowl in the United States - providing important early warning for the commercial poultry industry.

The COVID-19 pandemic heightens the need for completing the modernization of the NWHC to ensure that our country has critical early detection of biological threats and robust national level bio-surveillance for high-consequence pathogens in wildlife. Currently, the NWHC is leading efforts to understand the risks of transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the cause of COVID-19, from humans to wildlife through experimental studies with wildlife species, and surveillance of wildlife for natural infections.

The NWHC consists of approximately 65,000 square feet of offices, common areas, and Biosafety Level Three (BSL-3) laboratories and animal holding facilities that are uniquely designed for wildlife species. The current facilities are 40-50 years old, and have been well maintained, but are now in need of life-cycle replacement. Importantly, without adequate funding for upgrades, the Center may not be able to meet future standards for the operation of high biocontainment facilities.

The NWHC studied various approaches to modernization, including the business case analyses to explore the most feasible, cost-effective, and least disruptive option for modernization. These options included comparing renovation versus new construction, owned versus leased facilities, and options for relocation. **Based on these analyses, NHWC determined that new construction on the current site is the most cost-effective option that minimizes disruption to continuity of operations.**

The analyses indicate approximately $135 million total is needed for new construction on the current site completed in one single phase with maximum efficiencies. This is the most cost-effective approach to the modernization. **Therefore, our organizations request the Subcommittee provides $76 million in no-year funding in the FY 2022 spending bill to allow NWHC to implement modernization in the most cost-effective manner, at a one-time cost.**

We feel strongly that NHWC has judiciously studied various approaches to identify the most economical path. As we've learned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, preparedness investments made by the Subcommittee today yield incredible savings compared to the cost of a high consequence disease outbreak. The last avian influenza outbreak in Midwest poultry farms resulted in approximately $3 billion of economic losses. The costs of the COVID-19 pandemic will be measured in trillions of dollars.

Thank you for your consideration of this situation as the Subcommittee considers 2022 funding. Our organizations look forward to working with you and your staff on this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact Lauren Broccoli with the American Veterinary Medical Association at lbroccoli@avma.org should you have any questions. Thank you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Association of Avian Pathologists
American Association of Bovine Practitioners
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Association of Swine Veterinarians
American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians
American Dairy Science Association
American Veterinary Medical Association
Animal Health Institute
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Boone and Crockett Club
FASS
Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas
Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals – Multistate Initiative
National Association of Federal Veterinarians
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Pork Producers Council
North American Renderers Association
Oregon Cattlemen's Association
Society for Range Management
United Egg Producers
US Animal Health Association
US Cattlemen's Association
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Committee
US Poultry and Egg Association

Utah Farm Bureau
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wyoming Stock Growers Association