



Society for Conservation Biology
North America

April 19, 2019

The Honorable Tom Udall
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Don Beyer
431 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: The Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act of 2019

Dear Senator Udall and Representative Beyer,

On behalf of the members of the Society for Conservation Biology North America (SCBNA), we write to express our strong support for the **Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act of 2019** (the Act). SCBNA, a non-profit organization, is affiliated with the global Society for Conservation Biology. SCBNA strives to serve as a boundary organization for the North American community of conservation practitioners to help bridge the gap between research and practice and to facilitate on-the-ground conservation successes. We greatly appreciate your leadership on this important legislation that will help protect and restore native wildlife and create more resilient landscapes across the nation.

The United States is a world leader in efforts to conserve wildlife through a robust network of public lands and waters that includes national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, and other conservation areas, yet wildlife populations continue to decline. Scientists estimate that one in five animal and plant species in the United States are at risk of extinction, largely as a result of habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation. Linking habitat through connective corridors is critical for sustaining biodiversity, ecosystem function, and robust populations into the future. Corridors increase wildlife movement between habitat areas by approximately 50 percent compared to areas not connected by corridors. As species adapt to rapidly changing conditions, including the impacts of climate change, we must take steps to facilitate their ability to travel between existing habitat cores to increase breeding success, genetic diversity, and access to food and shelter. The recently released fourth National Climate Assessment stated *“habitat fragmentation and loss of connectivity (due to urbanization, roads, dams, etc.) can prevent species from tracking shifts in their required climate.”* Therefore, it is critical that the United States redouble its efforts to retain, restore, and establish wildlife corridors to ease wildlife movements and range shifts.

The Act establishes a National Wildlife Corridors Program that would provide for the designation of National Wildlife Corridors on federal public lands as well as funding for states, tribes, and other entities to enhance habitat connectivity on non-federal lands through wildlife crossings and other habitat connectivity projects. This will ensure that fish, wildlife, and plants can move between habitats for migration, dispersal, genetic exchange, and climate adaptation across the country. The bill directs federal land and water management agencies to collaborate with each other, as well as with states, tribes, local governments, and private landowners, to develop and manage national wildlife corridors consistent

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with existing laws and according to the habitat connectivity needs of native species. The bill also creates a publicly available National Wildlife Corridors Database to inform corridor protection. Establishing this program is a critical step forward in protecting and restoring fish, wildlife, and plant species populations across our nation's lands and waters.

Improving human and wildlife road safety by mitigating wildlife collisions is another important focus area of the Act. Estimated costs for wildlife vehicle collisions are more than \$8 billion dollars per year in the United States. Fencing and associated wildlife crossing structures (including bridges, enlarged and retrofitted culverts, and tunnels designed to help wildlife safely cross the road) have proven to be the most effective way to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions.

Increasingly, wildlife corridor protection has bipartisan support around the country. The Western Governors' Association approved a resolution that established a Corridor Protection Initiative, issued an extensive Wildlife Corridors Initiative report, and approved the Protecting Wildlife Migration Corridors and Crucial Wildlife Habitat in the West policy resolution. The Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers passed a resolution recognizing the importance of ecological connectivity for the adaptability and resilience of their region's ecosystems, biodiversity, and human communities in the face of climate change.

Federal agencies and states are also beginning to work together to protect wildlife corridors. The U.S. Forest Service, working with the state of Wyoming, private landowners, sportsmen, and conservation organizations, established the nation's first federally designated wildlife corridor to protect a centuries-old migration route for pronghorn that connects their summer range in Grand Teton National Park with their winter range far to the south in Wyoming's Green River Valley. Today, the Path of the Pronghorn conserves one of the longest remaining terrestrial mammal migration corridors in North America. Additionally, states such as New Hampshire and California have recently passed legislation to protect wildlife corridors.

Many of America's most treasured wildlife, including the Florida panther, bighorn sheep, the monarch butterfly, bull trout, and dozens of salmon runs are threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation. Just as people need roads and highways to travel from one place to another, fish, wildlife, and even plants also need corridors connecting natural communities. The Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act will provide key tools for conserving our nation's wildlife and natural heritage for future generations.

Sincerely,

Sally Ann Sims

Sally Ann Sims, MS
Member, SCBNA Policy Committee