

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 8, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
U.S. House of Representatives
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-4901

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House of Representatives
233 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-051

Re: Reject FY 2018 Appropriations Riders that Undermine the Endangered Species Act

Dear Speaker Ryan and Minority Leader Pelosi:

We write to express our great concern over a number of harmful provisions in H.R. 3354 – the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2018 (“Make America Secure and Prosperous Act, 2018”) – that would undermine endangered species conservation and threaten one of our country’s most important wildlife conservation laws – the Endangered Species Act. We urge you to ensure that these controversial and far-reaching provisions are not included in final spending legislation for FY 2018.

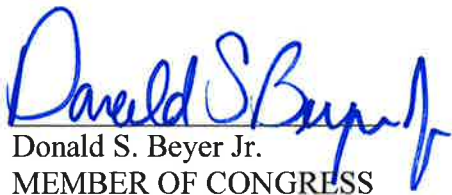
The appropriations process has become a perennial magnet for provisions and amendments that seek to make significant changes to U.S. environmental policies. Rather than taking their policy proposals to the appropriate authorizing committees, many members have instead opted to insert them into appropriations bills, often without full consideration by Congress. These misguided efforts weigh down the important process to fund the federal government. We object to these policy provisions – especially those provisions that threaten American’s air, water, wildlife, and public lands. This letter focuses on the seven provisions currently in H.R. 3354 aimed at weakening the Endangered Species Act – a law that continues to serve as our nation’s most effective law in protecting wildlife in danger of extinction. We also strongly oppose a provision that would block implementation of critical rules developed by the National Park Service to regulate non-subsistence hunting in Alaska national preserves.

When Congress passed the Endangered Species Act with near-unanimous consent, species were struggling to survive in the face of unmitigated human-caused threats to their existence. Since the Endangered Species Act was enacted, many of these species have rebounded over the course of just a few decades, including the bald eagle, the brown pelican and the humpback whale. Ninety-nine percent of species that have been listed under the Endangered Species Act have escaped the final fate of extinction, and many are once again thriving. We have a moral responsibility to continue to be good stewards of our environment and protect our natural resources for future generations. That translates into maintaining a strong federal Endangered Species Act that relies on sound science to guide decision-making. Polling shows that 90 percent of American voters support the Endangered Species Act and 71 percent believe scientists should make decisions about how to protect imperiled species, not politicians.

Nevertheless, the underlying FY 2018 Interior/EPA bill that passed out of the Appropriations Committee contained three riders that undermine endangered species conservation by singling out certain imperiled species and denying them the protections of the Endangered Species Act. One would continue for a fourth year a rider that prevents the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) from taking any steps to list the sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act. In September 2015, FWS determined that the greater sage-grouse was not warranted for listing under the Endangered Species Act, citing an unprecedented landscape-scale planning process as reducing threats to sage grouse - plans that will almost certainly be weakened under a new process initiated by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. This amendment would prevent an ESA listing for the sage-grouse, even if it declines closer to extinction. Another would block Endangered Species Act protections for wolves in the Midwest, reaffirm a court decision that delisted wolves in Wyoming, and obstruct citizens' ability to go to court to challenge these delistings. Still another provision would go so far as to defund recovery measures for gray wolves throughout the entire continental United States, even though wolves currently inhabit only 15 percent of their historic range. This same provision would also block all spending on recovery efforts for the Mexican gray wolves, even though there are just 113 individual animals left in the United States and 35 in Mexico. The job of restoring wolves to still-suitable habitat across the United States – as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has done for other wide-ranging species like the bald eagle – is far from done. The bill only got worse on the floor, when 3 additional riders that would undermine the Endangered Species Act and harm threatened and endangered species conservation were added to the bill. Finally, Representative Don Young added an amendment that would void a federal rule conserving bears and wolves on national preserves in Alaska. If this language is enacted, the National Park Service would not be able to prevent unsportsmanlike hunting practices on lands under its own jurisdiction, including spotlighting denning bears and cubs as they hibernate.

We urge you to use your positions of leadership to uphold our nation's legacy of protecting our natural heritage for future generations of Americans and reject the inclusion of any of these attacks on the Endangered Species Act and wildlife in any final bill to fund the federal government. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Donald S. Beyer Jr.
MEMBER OF CONGRESS


Debbie Dingell
MEMBER OF CONGRESS


Raúl Grijalva
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

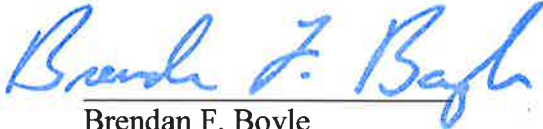

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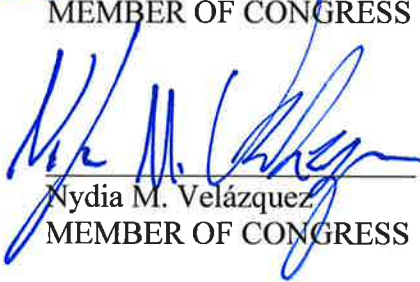


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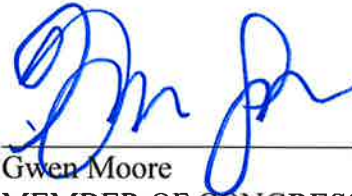
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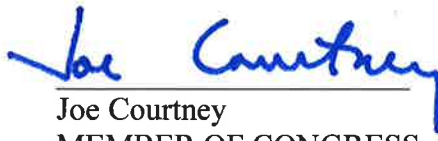
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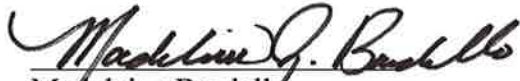
Donald Payne, Jr.
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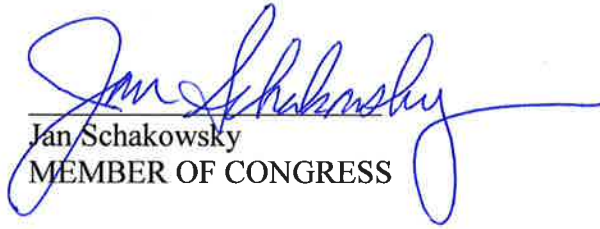
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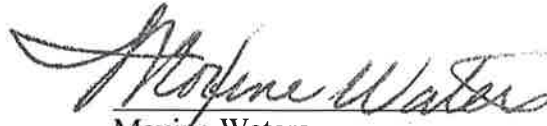



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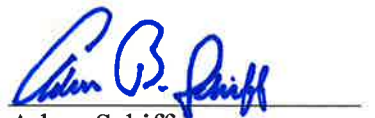

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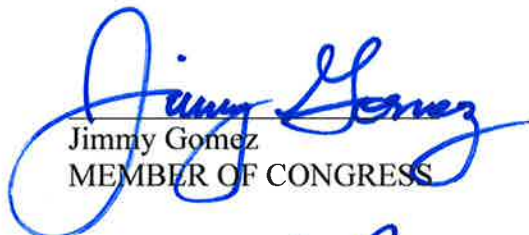
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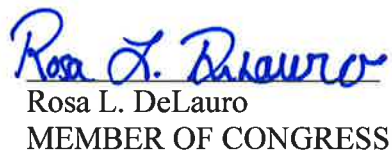
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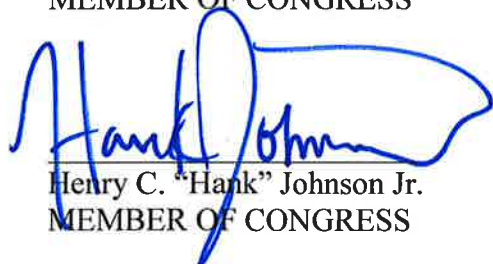
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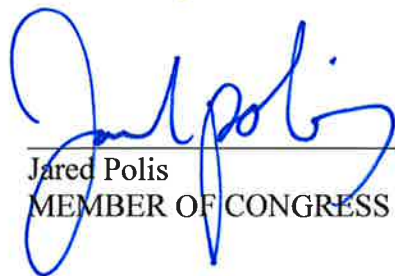
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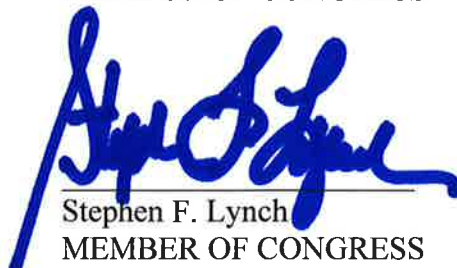
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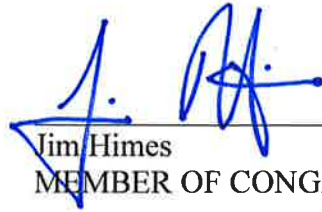
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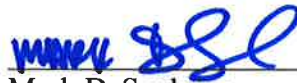
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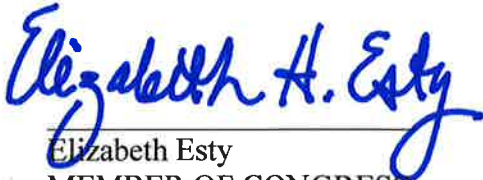
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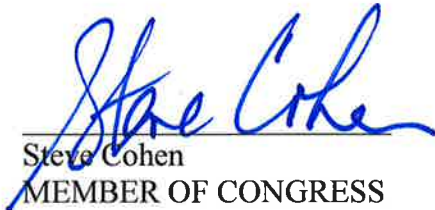
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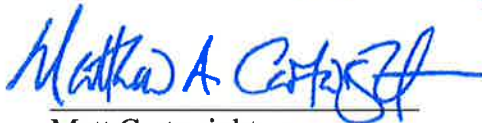
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Cc: The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen, The Honorable Nita Lowey