

Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council

April 28, 2023

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

On behalf of the Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council, I want to thank you for the work that the Department of the Interior and its agencies are undertaking on behalf of all Americans, sportsmen and women, wildlife and their habitat, and other conservationists around the United States.

As you know, many conservation organizations have enthusiastically supported historic conservation funding legislation in both the 116th and 117th Congresses that aggressively sought to fund the extensive maintenance backlog on our Nation's public lands while also making a significant investment in wildlife habitat infrastructure on both federal and state-owned areas.

Through the passage and enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act on August 4, 2020, which included the creation of the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund, the Department of the Interior was provided \$1.9 billion annually over five years to address the crumbling infrastructure on our nation's public lands. Along with dedicated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, these funding sources provided a generational investment in both acquiring and maintaining our nation's public lands.

Additionally, on August 16th, 2022, President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act into law. Along with making large-scale investments in clean energy and climate solutions, this legislation provided much needed funding for direct expenditures, grants, and cooperative agreements for rebuilding and restoring units of the National Wildlife Refuge System and, equally as important, state-owned wildlife management areas by, among other things, increasing the resiliency and capacity of habitats and infrastructure to withstand weather events.

The conservation community supports these investments because the threats and challenges facing our Nation's public lands continue to grow daily. Weather-related events require us all to focus attention and funding to adequately address management infrastructure and capacity to support resilient habitat on both federal and state-owned lands.

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Over the last few years, several nongovernmental organization partners collaborated to assess maintenance needs and identify potential projects on both the National Wildlife Refuge System and state Wildlife Management Areas. This preliminary assessment which was conducted with local refuge staff and state fish and wildlife agency personnel, represented a unique opportunity to fund projects that will have real, on the ground, impacts to both habitat and the outdoor recreation community immediately.

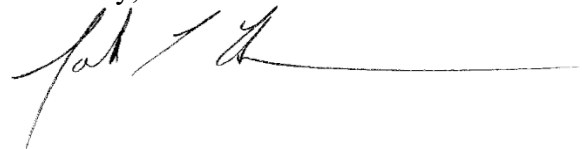
As you and your staff move forward with planning where this important funding will go, we urge you to cooperate with the same partners who helped secure this funding to identify and prioritize project opportunities on both the National Wildlife Refuge System and state-owned Wildlife Management Areas to have the greatest impact on improving quality habitat while also providing outdoor recreation opportunities for the American people.

In addition, important to us and the important goals this new funding accomplishes, is for the funds to “get out the door” as soon as possible. Given the significant size of the funds and the urgency to get them on the ground, we urge you to utilize every authority you have to deploy as many resources to the administration of these funds as soon as possible. For example, there may be opportunity and flexibility with the use of detailees, intra-agency staff reassignment, interagency sharing of personnel, the use of limited-term employees, 638 contracts with Tribes and other Tribal co-stewardship authorities, and contracts with non-governmental entities to help administer the disbursement of the funds to the priority projects.

We clearly recognize that this funding cannot address the full list of maintenance and infrastructure needs on our state and federal public lands, but it has the potential to have real impacts on key areas that are important to wildlife and people alike.

We look forward to working with you and the agencies you oversee to put this funding to good use on the places that need it the most. Should you have questions or need more information regarding this matter, please contact Doug Hobbs, the Council’s Designated Federal Officer, at doug_hobbs@fws.gov or (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Devney", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

John Devney
Vice Chair

Cc: HWCC members

Matt Strickler, Deputy Assistant Secretary

Martha Williams, Director

Cynthia Martinez, Chief – NWRS

Barbara Wainman, AD – Office of Communications