



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington D.C. 20240



Mr. Collin O'Mara
Chair, Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council
c/o Doug Hobbs, Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
5275 Leesburg Pike, MS: OC
Falls Church, Virginia 22041

Dear Mr. O'Mara:

Thank you for your letter of May 30, 2023, from the Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council, asking the Department of the Interior (Department) to prioritize forest health projects that benefit wildlife and habitat conservation as it uses funding made available through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and other Department bureaus continue our efforts to invest IRA and BIL funds into projects that benefit wildlife and their habitats, including those promoting forest health. Three examples from the Service representing major IRA project investments include the Albemarle-Pamlico Sound Restoration project (APSR), the Lower Mississippi River Valley (LMV) project, and the Northern Forests project. These efforts are opportunities to implement resilient, nature-based solutions that also have significant focus on forest health.

The APSR project has an important component of reducing saltwater intrusion into inland forests. The project is addressing hydrology problems to reduce salt intrusion in the project area and will result in healthy forests that are more resistant to climate impacts. The LMV project is focused on restoring and enhancing bottomland hardwood forests by addressing altered hydrology, afforestation, thinning degraded hardwood plantations and using ecological forestry. These management activities promote healthy habitats across broad forest landscapes. As part of the project, up to 5,800 acres of forest will be replanted and up to 90,000 acres of plantations will be thinned. When successfully implemented, both projects will significantly enhance forest health.

Additionally, Northern Forest health improvement projects in the Service's Northeast, Midwest and Mountain-Prairie Regions include treating degraded forests to improve health, climate resiliency, and wildlife habitat on 1.2 million acres. The Service will undertake efforts to reforest old crop land, fields, and other altered lands, as well as conduct a forest inventory that guides more expansive delivery of restoration for climate resilience.

The Service innovatively brought \$23.6M in BIL funds to conduct hazardous fuel reductions and wildfire recovery to benefit private lands and other non-federal landowners through our Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Coastal programs. The Service leveraged resources to benefit 24 projects on over 90,000 acres in 14 states to address the effects of wildfires on private lands and landowners.

The BLM is also undertaking IRA and BIL projects that will have positive benefits for forest health and wildlife. For example, in July 2023 the BLM awarded agreements with CAL FIRE, Caltrans and the California Conservation Corps, to increase restoration work, fuels reduction and forest health projects on BLM-managed public lands in California. The three cooperative agreements are being funded through the BIL.

The Department's wildland fire professionals continue to strategically place hazardous fuels treatments on public lands to mitigate wildfires and enhance habitat resiliency by conducting fuels treatments on over 1.6 million acres in Fiscal Year 2023.

The Service, BLM and other Department bureaus will continue to identify projects that fulfill the funding priorities established through both IRA and BIL, including projects that benefit forest health, wildlife and their habitat, and recreational opportunities.

The Service looks forward to continuing to support and coordinate with the Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council as you work to provide input and recommendations to both the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture.

Sincerely,

Martha Williams
Director