

**IJA INVESTMENTS IN HABITAT
AND ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION,
POLLINATORS, AND WILDLIFE CROSSINGS**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
**COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS**
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

DECEMBER 6, 2023

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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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**IIJA INVESTMENTS IN HABITAT AND ECO-
SYSTEM RESTORATION, POLLINATORS, AND
WILDLIFE CROSSINGS**

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS,
Washington, DC.

U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works Wash-
ington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m. in room
406, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Thomas R. Carper
(chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Carper, Capito, Whitehouse, Merkley, Kelly,
Padilla, Ricketts, Boozman, and Sullivan.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. THOMAS R. CARPER,
U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF DELAWARE**

Senator CARPER. Good morning, everyone. We are pleased to call
this hearing to order.

As you know, we have gathered today to examine several of the
Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's investments in habitat and eco-
system restoration. As we do so, we are privileged to have leaders
from two key agencies join us to discuss our shared goals of sup-
porting infrastructure development, while also protecting important
wildlife habitat.

With that, I want to begin by welcoming Martha Williams. Usual-
ly, we don't ask witnesses to testify under oath, but since it is
your birthday today and we are interested in finding how old you
are—

[Laughter.]

Senator CARPER. No, seriously, happy birthday and thank you for
spending your birthday with all of us.

I understand your parents are still alive. Tell your mom and dad
we said thanks for bringing you into the world, raising you, and
sharing you with our Nation.

With that, I want to welcome Martha, Director of the U.S. Fish
and Wildlife Service and Brian Fouch. You are the Associate Ad-
ministrator for Federal Lands at the Federal Highway Administra-
tion, if I am not mistaken. Is that right? How long have you held
that post?

Mr. FOUCH. Over 25 years.

Senator CARPER. You started right out of high school. We thank
you both for taking time to join us today.

Since helping to pass the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, in large part, written literally in this room by Senator Capito and other colleagues and our staffs, since helping pass that law over 2 years ago, our committee has spent a fair amount of time analyzing its implementation.

It is one thing to have hearings on the legislation. It is another thing to vote in committees and subcommittees. It is another thing to pass it in the House, the Senate, reconcile the differences, and get the President to sign it into law. The hard part sometimes is implementation. We have to continue to focus a lot on implementation of those pieces of legislation as we implement the transformational investments in our Nation's roads, highways and bridges, as well as our drinking water and wastewater infrastructure.

Today, we will build on that earlier work by discussing some of our lesser known but meaningful investments in ecosystem restoration, wildlife crossings and pollinator habitat. I have long believed that we can grow our economy and support jobs while protecting our environment. That is a theme that you will hear voiced almost every time we meet in this committee.

Programs that we are examining today and the fact that Congress is investing in them through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, I might add, with the encouragement of the current Administration, are proof that I am not alone in that belief. We are not alone in that belief.

Specifically, in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we provided the Fish and Wildlife Service with \$455 million to facilitate fish passage across our Nation to support four regional restoration initiatives, including the Delaware River Basin Program.

Today, we look forward to hearing from Director Williams about how the Service is putting these dollars to work quickly and how these investments improve resiliency and leverage private investments.

In the Delaware River Basin, we have seen first-hand how restoration activities oftentimes make our communities stronger while benefiting our economy. For example, we know that when we make our ecosystems more resilient, cleanup our drinking water, and conserve wildlife habitat, it makes Delaware a more attractive place to work, to play, and to live. I think that is true not just for the first State, but it is true for all States.

As part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we also provided the Federal Highway Administration with \$350 million to stand up a pilot program for wildlife crossings across the Country. In addition, we authorized \$10 million over 5 years for the agency to support pollinator-friendly roadsides and highway rights-of-way.

Why did we do that? Well, in addition to habitat fragmentation driving biodiversity loss, wildlife-vehicle collisions represent a serious safety issue for drivers. In fact, there are more than one million vehicle collisions involving wildlife each year in our Country. The good news is that by working together, the Federal Government, States, and other conservation partners, we are making progress to address both issues.

Just yesterday, the Federal Highway Administration announced the first round of grants under the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Pro-

gram. We applaud that. It is worth noting that the demand for this funding outweighed the available dollars by five times, demonstrating the clear demand and need for this important program.

What is more, the pilot program is already catalyzing action at the State and local levels. For example, some States are now passing laws and setting aside funding to contribute to this work. We are encouraged by that.

Some States have identified the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program as a possible funding source in their planning documents. In the past 2 years, 12 States, including a couple of States represented here today, California, Utah, Massachusetts, and others, have passed legislation to support wildlife crossings and committed an estimated \$240 million to fund habitat connectivity projects.

Other States have been leading on wildlife crossings for some time and are creatively engaging the public in their efforts. For example, Wyoming sells wildlife conservation license plates that help fund the State's work to construct crossings. Businesses even provide discounts to customers who purchase these conservation license plates.

Let me close by saying that the Federal Highway Administration has an incredible opportunity to partner with others as you work to implement the pilot program. That includes working with the Department of the Interior and its agencies, including the Fish and Wildlife Service, which we know have a wealth of expertise in prioritizing habitat connectivity.

We are interested in learning more today about how the Federal Highway Administration is collaborating with the Service, with States, and other stakeholders to make the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program as successful and impactful as possible.

We also hope to hear more today about how the Federal Highway Administration is balancing the habitat connectivity needs of smaller species with larger species and how the agency is considering aquatic connectivity in this new program.

With all of that in mind, we look forward to hearing from Associate Administrator Fouch today about his agency's experience getting the wildlife crossings program off the ground, both the challenges as well as the opportunities going forward.

With that in mind, I want to turn to our Ranking Member, Senator Capito, whose State, my native State, has a great interest and has set a great example, I think, in many respects in this area.

Thank you for your leadership, Senator Capito.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO,
U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA**

Senator CAPITO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming today and holding this hearing.

Director Williams, it is always great to see you. Happy birthday. I want to thank you for being always just a phone call away and always eager and ready to help us and our State as we have navigated some issues throughout the last several years. Thank you. I am deeply appreciative of that.

Mr. Fouch, I was happy to hear, and you and I talked briefly, that you spent some of your time working at the West Virginia De-

partment of Transportation and living in my hometown city of Charleston, West Virginia. So that is five stars for me. Thank you for your continued public service.

Today we are discussing, as the Chairman said, the wildlife provisions that were included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, IIJA. I am pleased that the Committee's Surface Transportation Reauthorization was really the foundation of the IIJA. As he said, a lot of that was written right in this room.

One of those provisions is the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program. The pilot program provides grants for projects designed to reduce collisions between vehicles and wildlife.

Last week, the Federal Highway Administration announced grant awards for Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023. FHWA awarded 19 grants at approximately \$110 million. I am sure you will tell us more about that in your statement.

I will be particularly interested in learning about FHWA's plan to expeditiously get those project grant agreements executed. It is one thing to say we are going to grant the money, but as we know, there is a pipeline then to move that money forward. We look forward to that.

It is worth noting that the projects funded under the pilot program may also be eligible under some of the existing core highway formula programs, including the Highway Safety Improvement Program.

Just a few weeks ago, our Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife held a hearing on the challenges and the opportunities to improve migration corridors. At that hearing, we heard a lot about how wildlife crossings can facilitate the migration of big game species, particularly in our western States. We also learned that there are other Federal programs and partnerships between Federal agencies, States, and the private landowners to help address these challenges.

A recent press release from West Virginia's Department of Transportation noted that according to insurance statistics, my State leads the Nation in deer strike accidents. I can attest to that since I have had at least two in my lifetime, and they are quite frequent.

Recently, we spoke with Department staff about this issue. The challenges faced in West Virginia are due to the unpredictable nature of these deer strikes. We see increases in deer strikes during hunting season which goes from October through December. The Department posts signs and provides information to the public to increase their awareness about this issue. As a native West Virginian, I think we are all aware that this is always a possibility.

The Department also balances addressing these collisions with other highway safety challenges in the State. As required by Federal law, the Department uses a data-driven process to develop a plan that guides its investments to improve highway safety.

The Department also looks for opportunities to help with species conservation. For example, some of the bridges that were built as part of Corridor H project allow species to continue following their natural paths along the ravines.

The IIJA also included a program that provides grants for activities that benefit pollinators along roadsides and highway rights-of-

way. It is my understanding that FHWA hopes to announce a notice of opportunity for that program in the coming weeks.

The supplemental appropriations portion of the IIJA also included funding for various regional programs administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I look forward to hearing from Director Williams on how implementation of these programs is going.

Thank you again, Chairman Carper, and I look forward to the hearing.

Senator CARPER. Thank you so much.

As the Ranking Member knows, my wife and I took a big road trip over Thanksgiving. Our sons are spread across the world, so we decided to go find other members of our family.

Our trip took us through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, back down to Ohio, through West Virginia and finally home. My wife is not a big music person but she somehow found something on Spotify, it was a countdown of the top 100 Beatle songs of all time selected by listeners which was great fun to hear.

She also loves books on tape so we had an opportunity to listen to a book on tape by Steve Jobs who helped in the creation of Apple and served a couple tours there. Those were highlights of the trip. One of the sad things on the trip was we saw a number of dead animals on the side of the road. One was a very large deer, I think a doe, female deer.

That still happens too often. It was a bit of a reminder, if you will, that this work is important and that there are real consequences to what we are doing here. Sometimes we focus just on the vehicular accidents that occur and maybe the injuries to drivers and passengers and so forth, but the ones who are dying are in many cases are God's creations. We have a moral responsibility to do everything we can to reduce that loss of life.

With that, this is an important hearing. We are delighted to be able to hear from all of you, especially on a special day for Martha Williams. Go right ahead. Happy birthday. That is the last time I will mention your birthday.

STATEMENT OF HON. MARTHA WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Chairman Carper. I would like to say I am celebrating my 50th along with the Endangered Species Act. But that may have passed just a couple of years ago.

Good morning, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the Fish and Wildlife Service's implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law or as we affectionately call it, BIL. Through BIL, Congress provided \$455 million in direct funding to the Service to support and implement conservation projects on landscapes across the Country. This funding is helping us tackle some of the biggest and most complex challenges facing fish, wildlife and their habitats.

Not only are we making significant strides for conservation, but we are also making a real and positive impact for the people and the local communities that we serve. Through BIL, we are putting locally led collaborative conservation at the center of our work.

By listening to communities, we are protecting people, infrastructure and wildlife habitat. All of this work supports good paying jobs today and makes investments that will pay out sustained economic and ecosystem dividends far down the road.

An example is our National Fish Passage Program, which removes barriers for fish passage, including unused dams. Through this program, the Service has worked to reopen over 64,000 miles of upstream habitat since its creation in 1999.

As the Senator knows, I traveled to West Virginia, where removal of a low head dam will help species return while keeping recreationists safe and benefiting the local community. The BIL is helping transform and expand this important work.

The Service is now chairing an Interagency Fish Passage Task Force that spans 13 agencies, helping to get \$2 billion in combined funding, as well as technical expertise to projects on the ground. I am proud to share that the Task Force is hard at work coordinating these investments today in Charleston, South Carolina, as we meet. These resources allow us to support community-led fish passage projects and interagency coordination on a level we simply couldn't match before BIL.

These transformational changes are not limited to the National Fish Passage Program, though. In the Klamath Basin, we have been working for decades with farmers, States and tribes to address water availability and improve conditions for people and fish.

BIL's \$162 million investment is allowing us to support large scale projects that local communities have wanted to see for years. We are installing pumps on wildlife refuges to improve water availability for 20,000 acres of habitat for migratory birds critical to the Pacific Flyway, while also freeing up water for farmers.

We are investing tens of millions of dollars to build out Klamath Falls National Fish Hatchery to assist in the recovery of endangered suckers. And we are working with communities to restore areas previously hit by wildfires to improve stream conditions.

At Lake Tahoe, using \$17 million from BIL, we have partnered with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe to conduct the largest aquatic invasive species project in the Basin's history. That is on top of this basin being really the gold standard for aquatic invasive species intervention.

Addressing invasive plants helps improve conditions for native fish, honors our commitment to working with tribes and preserves Lake Tahoe's recreational value.

Chairman Carper, I have had the opportunity, the delightful opportunity, to work closely with you on the Delaware River Basin. BIL funding is supplementing the work we have been doing with communities since 2016 under the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act.

In Wilmington, we are improving river health and wildlife habitat while reducing flood risks to nearby neighborhoods. On the coast, we are restoring habitat for Red Knots and Horseshoe Crabs, and we are improving public access to parks and trails up and down the basin.

I am extremely proud of the Fish and Wildlife Service's implementation of BIL so far. This funding and the communities and the agencies we are partnering with has transformed how we tackle

some of our biggest conservation challenges and has accelerated long lasting solutions.

I am excited to see what we can accomplish together in the coming years. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the committee today and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Williams follows:]

**Testimony of
Martha Williams, Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior
Before the
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
On
Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Investments in Habitat and Ecosystem Restoration
December 6, 2023**

Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which we commonly refer to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law or BIL. This transformational investment included \$455 million in direct funding over five years for the Service to support and implement projects which, at their very core, help local, state, and Tribal communities tackle the climate crisis, advance environmental justice, and protect our cherished wildlife and natural resources. The law supports good paying jobs today and makes investments in nature that will pay out sustained economic and ecosystem dividends far down the road.

The Service collaborates with a diverse and extensive network of partners to accomplish its conservation mission. Our partners are found in local communities, Tribes, state and federal agencies, and among private landowners and non-governmental organizations. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law supercharged our collaborative work in key areas that advance the Service's mission. The funding directly appropriated to the Service supports the national fish passage program and focused conservation efforts in the Klamath Basin, sagebrush ecosystem, Delaware River Basin, and Lake Tahoe. Additionally, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides the Service \$180 million for maintaining, improving, and constructing roads, trails, and other transportation infrastructure. Finally, the Service receives additional BIL funding through the Department of the Interior's orphan well remediation, wildland fire, and ecosystem restoration programs. Together, these funding streams allow the Service to better support locally led conservation projects, improve public access, and protect people, infrastructure, and wildlife habitat.

As the Service has worked to implement this funding in the field, our partners have provided crucial input to identify the best places and priorities for BIL funding. When the Service is selecting a fish passage project, we rely on input from communities to help us identify need. For example, local input helped identify an undersized culvert in the Klamath Basin that is not only cutting off fish habitat, but regularly floods out, blocking community access to emergency services. In the Delaware River Basin, partners on the ground guide the implementation of a living shoreline project to restore the health of two rivers and provide flood protection for local communities. At Lake Tahoe, our partners are helping prioritize efforts to address aquatic invasive species by highlighting areas where the community is seeing the largest impacts to recreational boating and fishing opportunities and to native fish habitat. In the sagebrush ecosystem, the Service and state and Tribal governments are working together to bank native

seeds and treat fire-prone invasive grasses that threaten community infrastructure and wildlife habitat.

The Service's collaboration with partners leverages BIL funding to benefit both people and wildlife. For example, our work with partners is restoring contaminated sites, which improves habitat and supports safer and healthier communities. We are removing high hazard dams, which restores native fish populations while providing safer boating opportunities. We are protecting infrastructure in communities by improving their resilience to fire and floods. And we are coordinating across the federal government to ensure investments in fish passage address needs of local communities like providing safer roads.

Outdoor recreation is a substantial and vitally important economic driver. The 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation showed that Americans took over 1.7 billion trips in 2022 to engage in hunting, fishing, boating, and other outdoor activities, spending \$394 billion on equipment, travel, licenses, and related expenses in the last year. The BIL environmental provisions make significant investments in improving access to, and the quality of, outdoor recreation opportunities. These investments support local economies.

While BIL funding spans a five-year period, the investments and projects supported by the law will provide benefits far into the future.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service BIL Funding

National Fish Passage Program

The National Fish Passage Program (NFPP) has the widest reach of the Service's BIL focus areas. Since 1999, the NFPP has been a national leader in connecting watersheds and people through financial and technical assistance. Throughout the program's history, the Service has worked with over 2,000 local communities, Tribes, and private landowners to address 3,500 barriers and reopen 64,000 miles of upstream habitat and over 193,000 acres of wetland for fish and other wildlife.

The once-in-a-generation investment in the nation's rivers and streams through BIL has expanded the ability of the Service to further work with communities to address a small portion of the millions of barriers to fish and aquatic wildlife across the country. These barriers block access to spawning grounds, food, and safe waters for economically important and threatened and endangered species alike. Barriers can also impede opportunities for outdoor recreation, impair transportation infrastructure, and contribute to flooding. The Service is working to put the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's \$200 million investment to work across the country, through projects both big and small, with community engagement and environmental stewardship at the center of the effort.

Through the Service's engagement with communities across the country, we are working to improve habitat and help fish species thrive from endangered Atlantic Salmon in Maine to the Bonneville Cutthroat Trout in Utah's Bear River watershed, to Alaska's iconic Sockeye and King Salmon. As we restore habitat connectivity for these species, the public is benefiting from reduced flooding, more resilient roadways, reduced risk of catastrophic failure from aging dams,

and improved water quality. As aquatic species make their home in the habitat along thousands of miles of newly reopened streams and rivers, local communities are seeing more robust fish and wildlife populations return, driving new outdoor recreation opportunities that are also safer for participants.

These investments are also helping ecosystems become more resilient to climate change. Addressing barriers to fish passage restores ecosystem conditions – such as stream flow rates, habitat types, and water temperatures – that are more optimal for fish species life cycles. This also creates more robust and resilient ecosystems that can help fish and other wildlife and plant species better adapt to changing environmental conditions resulting from climate change. For example, better stream connectivity and fish passage builds more diverse and productive ecosystem food webs.

To date, the Service has obligated \$73 million in BIL funding for 79 fish passage projects in 30 states and Puerto Rico, which will open more than 6,000 miles of streams and rivers.

One example of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's positive impact is the Potomac Headwaters Fish Passage Restoration throughout Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. This \$1.15 million investment is scheduled to open 195 stream miles and reconnect 150 square miles of Brook Trout cold water refugia by 2024. Restoring brook trout access to cold water refugia improves their resilience to warming water temperatures, caused by climate change, and provides habitat to recover from other climate related stressors. A watershed-scale project would not be possible without partners such as Trout Unlimited and the communities along the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay who have put their own time and energy into similar efforts for over 15 years and helped provide expertise to ensure dollars are going to the areas of highest need. In addition to supporting other native species like the American Eel, local communities will benefit from the replacement of failing and undersized culverts along roadways, vastly improving public safety for drivers in rural areas. This is just one example of how the NFPP is getting BIL dollars into communities in a timely manner to create jobs and provide a multitude of benefits for ecosystems and people.

At a broader level, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has helped thirteen federal agencies come together under the banner of the Interagency Fish Passage Task Force to address the fragmentation of our nation's aquatic ecosystems. The Task Force is coordinating the investment of \$2 billion in funding, helping all thirteen agencies share expertise, leverage resources, and improve collaboration to create lasting benefits for our natural infrastructure.

Klamath Basin

For two decades, the Klamath Basin has relied on collaboration and partnerships to address its diverse water needs in the face of ongoing droughts and limited water supplies. Clean, healthy water and fertile land make the watershed a home to Tribal communities, productive agriculture, and abundant populations of migratory birds, suckers, salmon, and other important aquatic and terrestrial species. The Service is working to put \$162 million in BIL funding to work to support the people and communities that are working to protect, restore, and manage this watershed for future generations.

The Service has been working closely with local partners, including California and Oregon, the Klamath Tribes, the Yurok Tribe, the Karuk Tribe, the Hoopa Valley Tribe, Quartz Valley Indian Reservation, Resighini Rancheria, private landowners, farmers and ranchers, and local sportsmen and women to improve conditions for fish, birds, and local communities with BIL funding. We have supported projects to create habitat for fish, monitor water quality, quantify ecosystem recovery, improve hydrologic models and better track salmon and sucker populations. We are using BIL funding to install pumping stations to improve water availability for national wildlife refuges and farms, support post-fire stream restoration activities in the Sprague River watershed after the Bootleg Fire, and restore natural springs.

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments in the Klamath Basin are also supporting a wide-reaching network of conservation projects. These projects improve water availability, fish habitat, and restore natural functions to the ecosystem, helping to build a more resilient Basin that can support the communities that call it home. So far, the Service has allocated \$26 million in BIL funding to support more than 30 projects driven by partners and communities addressing local and regional needs. This includes \$10 million for the first phase of a significant expansion of the Klamath Falls National Fish Hatchery to prevent the extinction of two federally listed species, the Lost River and shortnose sucker, which are found only in the Klamath Basin. This will create jobs, advance sucker recovery, and reduce community conflict over water needs for the ecosystem and local agriculture. These investments at the fish hatchery are working in parallel with funding for the Klamath Tribes' own sucker rearing and salmon reintroduction programs. The hatchery investment enjoys support from both Tribal and agricultural communities, representing a key point of consensus.

One local example is the restoration of Waukell and Junior Creeks, which will replace two undersized culverts. The current culverts hinder passage for migrating salmon and cause flooding during storms that can cut off the single access road to the Resighini Rancheria community, isolating them from emergency services. Replacing these culverts illustrates how ecosystem restoration, community health and safety, and infrastructure can go hand in hand.

Sagebrush Ecosystem

America's sagebrush ecosystem is the lifeblood of rural communities and Tribal lands in the West. Sprawling across 175 million acres and 11 western states, the sagebrush ecosystem supports Tribal cultural practices; agricultural, energy and mineral production; outdoor recreation; and hundreds of species that live nowhere else in the world. In recent years, sagebrush ecological integrity has been threatened by increasingly long and severe wildfire seasons driven by climate change, lengthy droughts, and invasive annual grasses. With \$50 million in BIL funding, the Service and our partners are accelerating efforts to conserve this vital landscape. From private landowners and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to Tribes across the West, these partners and rural communities actively support ongoing investments to protect this landscape and mitigate wildfire risks, protect water resources, and conserve at-risk species.

To date, the Service has worked with partners to allocate \$28.9 million in BIL funding for 173 projects across the western United States. In Fiscal Year 2024, the Service is providing over \$1 million in BIL funding for Tribally led sagebrush projects. Together with the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone Tribes of the Wind River Reservation, the Service recently announced our Fiscal Year 2024 list of BIL-funded projects. Among those projects is the creation of an Invasive Annual Grass Management Collaborative between the Service, Tribes of the Wind River Reservation, the State of Wyoming, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments and partners. The Service will work collaboratively to implement projects that control invasive grasses and conserve approximately 100,000 acres of high-quality sagebrush habitat.

These investments root out invasive grasses, protecting core sagebrush habitat while also reducing the threat of severe wildfires to nearby communities. Other BIL-funded sagebrush conservation projects will help keep water resources and agricultural economies viable on the landscape through installation of wildlife-friendly fences to protect important mesic habitats. A core tenet of the Service's approach to BIL implementation is to work closely with Tribes, private landowners, state agencies, ranchers, and local communities to identify and pursue projects that align closely with these partners' priorities.

Delaware River Basin

For years, the Delaware River Basin has been home to voluntary, partner-led conservation efforts. With support from the Service, communities have pursued projects to reduce flooding and runoff, restore fish and wildlife habitat, improve water quality, and enhance safe recreational access for the public. This dedication to ground-up conservation has garnered recognition from Congress, which passed the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act in 2016, and reaffirmed support for those efforts with \$26 million in funding for the Basin through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This funding has allowed the Service to enhance our ongoing support for partners in the Basin, including the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the states of Delaware, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.

Working together with these and many other partners, the Service has been able to put BIL funding to work to improve habitat for fish and wildlife and provide Basin communities new and improved recreational and economic opportunities. BIL funds support a range of conservation and restoration projects that contribute to the wellbeing and economic vitality of the communities in the Delaware River watershed. Since 2022, the Service has allocated \$9 million in BIL funding supporting 18 projects across the watershed. BIL-funded projects advance ecosystem resilience, fish and aquatic species passage, reduce flood risk, and improve community access to these natural areas. Improving community access is especially important for disadvantaged communities, and for local businesses focusing on fish and wildlife related recreation. These strategic investments complement the 177 projects that have been funded to date through the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act.

One example of this important BIL-funded work in the Delaware River Basin is the Service's support for the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary to implement a 300-foot living shoreline habitat restoration project. This restoration project is part of the locally led Christina Brandywine Remediation Restoration and Resilience Initiative (CBR4), with additional support from national

partners and the State of Delaware. The goal of CBR4 is to address legacy pollution and restore the health of the Lower Christina River and tidal Brandywine River so they are once again swimmable, drinkable, and fishable. Additionally, the restored shrublands and wetlands adjacent to the shoreline will increase the area's natural beauty and help protect communities in Wilmington from flooding, providing benefits to some of Wilmington's most vulnerable communities. To date the Service has funded four projects that are part of the CBR4 initiative and one that complements the initiative, helping to advance the ecological and economic recovery at the core of this effort.

Lake Tahoe

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's geographic focus extends to Lake Tahoe, the world's tenth-deepest lake, and one of the clearest and most spectacular bodies of water in the nation. Today, Lake Tahoe's native Lahontan cutthroat trout and other native aquatic species are threatened by the aquatic weed Eurasian watermilfoil and other aquatic invasive species. Native species like Lahontan cutthroat trout are critical for the health of the ecosystem and are an important part of the culture and history of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California. Invasive weeds can also snare boat propellers, reduce fish populations for anglers, and create dense mats of plant matter at the water's surface. These threats to recreational boating and fishing opportunities on the lake impact local economies. Tackling any invasive species requires coordination and collaboration, and that is the focus of the Service's \$17 million in Lake Tahoe BIL funding. We are working closely with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the Washoe Tribe, and the multi-partner Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinating Committee to identify priority projects and support locally led conservation efforts. To date, the Service has allocated \$6.5 million in BIL funding for the Basin, supporting 9 projects and the jobs that carry them out.

The largest of those projects has been addressing aquatic invasive species in the Taylor-Tallac ecosystem, which is the largest functioning wetland at Lake Tahoe. Taylor-Tallac has the potential to provide habitat for almost every native species in the Basin, but the Taylor and Tallac creeks and marshes are infested with the invasive aquatic weed, Eurasian watermilfoil. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency has used BIL funding from the Service to install 17 acres of benthic barriers designed to block sunlight and inhibit growth of these aggressive invasive plants. Addressing this invasive species in the Taylor Tallac ecosystem represents the largest eradication project implemented in the Basin so far and will serve as a model for other similar ecosystem restoration efforts in the Basin.

Throughout our efforts at Taylor-Tallac and elsewhere in the Basin, local leadership has been central to the Service's work at Lake Tahoe. We have worked to incorporate bilingual signage to increase public awareness about aquatic invasive species and are supplementing existing seasonal watercraft inspection stations with new permanent stations to speed up processing of recreational watercraft and improve public access without spreading invasive species. We are also deeply invested in working with the Washoe Tribe to manage these lands and waters and have provided funding for the Tribe to plan for, monitor, and control aquatic invasive plants and fish while recovering native species, including Lahontan cutthroat trout. Working with local communities and the Washoe Tribe, we will continue to identify and implement successful BIL projects that further the health of Lake Tahoe.

Federal Lands Transportation Program

The Service's transportation network is vital to our conservation mission. Our roads, trails, bridges, parking lots, and other transportation assets provide our land managers with access to the natural resources we are entrusted to protect. Equally as important, these assets provide the American public with safe and reliable ways to access and enjoy nature. Fueling this vast transportation network is the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP) – the Service's primary funding source to address transportation-related needs. The Service has received FLTP funding through the surface transportation bill since 1998, including \$36 million annually from FY 2022-2026 through the BIL. This funding supports jobs and the construction, improvement, and maintenance of our transportation infrastructure – a need that only continues to grow as the demand for outdoor recreation increases.

Since the BIL's passage, the Service has worked diligently to invest FLTP funds to support projects that benefit wildlife and communities. From FY 2022-2023, the Service invested over \$62.5 million in FLTP funding to support 191 transportation projects across the country. For instance, we recently completed a \$560,000 project to rehabilitate Jim's Landing at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. Jim's Landing is a popular recreation site that attracts tens of thousands of visitors annually who come to fish the world-class Upper Kenai River – a fishery whose economic impact is estimated to be more than \$500 million per year. Based on the input and needs of the local community, the Service used these FLTP funds to improve and expand access at main ingress and egress points, reduce physical barriers, and provide a more meaningful experience for visitors. This project underscores the importance of FLTP funding in helping the Service better welcome and engage communities in wildlife-dependent recreation on Service lands and waters.

Department of the Interior BIL Funding

In addition to funding allocated directly to the Service through the BIL, the Service is also working closely with the Department of the Interior to implement multi-agency BIL priorities, including orphan well remediation, wildland fire suppression, and a multi-landscape ecosystem restoration framework.

Orphan Wells

BIL represents the largest investment in tackling the removal of abandoned oil and gas equipment from National Wildlife Refuge System lands in American history. Abandoned sites are environmental hazards that jeopardize public health and safety by contaminating groundwater and emitting greenhouse gases such as methane. The equipment itself poses a direct threat to wildlife, their habitats, and people. Cleaning up these sites stops the ongoing damage to the ecosystem, and makes refuge lands safe for fish, wildlife, and people, while reducing impacts to air and water quality for nearby communities. To date, the Service has received nearly \$30 million through the Department of the Interior to begin removing and remediating 273 sites on 12 different refuges across the country, creating good paying jobs that are putting a significant dent in the hundreds of abandoned wells on refuge lands.

BIL funds have been critical in helping the Service and its partners improve refuge lands to benefit wildlife and local communities. For instance, the Service used BIL funds to establish a Cooperative Agreement with the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to address orphan well plugging and reclamation in the state. Through their existing Oilfield Site Restoration Program, the Louisiana DNR adds orphan wells on refuge lands into their statewide program and plugs those wells using the same contractors and resources involved in plugging state-managed orphan wells. This results in program efficiencies and reduced costs for both the Louisiana DNR and the Service.

One of the standout features of this initiative is its commitment to local communities. The Louisiana DNR actively engages local companies and small businesses that employ local labor, thereby stimulating economic activity within the region. Beyond the economic benefits, these collaborative efforts play a pivotal role in the restoration of habitat across Louisiana. To date, this collaboration has led to the successful plugging of over 100 orphan wells in northern Louisiana, showcasing the positive impact of BIL funding on both conservation, safety, and local economies.

Wildfire

We are facing longer and more severe wildfire seasons across the country, posing new risks to the people and infrastructure which surround our national wildlife refuges as well as habitat for the species we manage. The Service is continuing to pursue an active fuels mitigation treatment regimen focused on prescribed fire, mechanical removal of dense vegetation and chemical treatment of exotic vegetation to limit the severity of wildfires. The Service's science-based treatment recommendations are often an order of magnitude larger than Service resources can meet. When vegetation builds up and is left untreated, wildfires can burn with a severity that dramatically increases the difficulty to protect our neighbors and damages the habitat we manage.

A \$26 million investment of BIL funds from the Department of the Interior into the Service's fire program has helped treat over 510,000 acres across the country. The Service also received an additional \$23 million dollars of BIL appropriations from the Department's Office of Wildland Fire for the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and Coastal Program in support of fuels reduction projects on approximately 90,000 acres of private lands adjacent to federal lands. Reducing fuel loads is critical to ensuring we are a good neighbor to adjacent state lands, communities, and private timber producers, such as on the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Georgia.

The Okefenokee NWR has a long history of large fires which are difficult to contain within the boundaries of the 407,000-acre refuge. This fire-prone area has twice won the national Pulaski Fire Leadership award for the working partnership created by the Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners. Additionally, the Service is working closely with The Nature Conservancy and the Georgia Forestry Commission to continue to support partner-driven fire management. BIL dollars have helped the Service proactively manage fuels off the refuge, protecting private lands and getting ahead of fires before they spread beyond the boundaries of the refuge. These treatments, including a 5,000-acre prescribed fire in FY 2024, will help to

protect our neighbors and the commercial timberlands that are the lifeblood of the community. The BIL is actively making communities safer, reducing wildfire risks, and supporting resilient forests on and off refuge lands.

Ecosystem Restoration

Through the Department of the Interior's Ecosystem Restoration BIL funding, the Service is working to support the Department's Restoration and Resilience Framework. The Framework supports and guides restoration programs across agencies, and prioritizes addressing climate change impacts, restoring healthy lands and waters, and enhancing communities' quality of life. For FY 2023, the Service has received almost \$29 million in Department of the Interior BIL funding for 37 projects across more than 20 states and territories, supporting a wide range of community-developed conservation projects. As the Service continues to implement Ecosystem Restoration funding, we are supporting ground-up conservation efforts like the following initiatives in Alaska and Hawaii.

In Alaska, the Service is supporting the cross-bureau Gravel to Gravel initiative with Alaska Native communities to restore salmon habitats and populations. Our projects will invest in co-stewardship with Tribes in the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Norton Sound region, restore degraded streams, and expand habitat restoration practices that replenish native vegetation. This work builds on previous efforts and relationships while catalyzing future Service work in Alaska.

In Hawaii, the Service is working with other federal agencies, the state of Hawaii, and Native Hawaiian communities to curb the spread of mosquito-borne avian malaria in Hawaii's native forest bird populations. As climate change accelerates, mosquitoes are expanding their ranges into habitat previously safe for Hawaii's native birds. Once, there were more than 50 species of honeycreepers spread throughout the islands; however, today 12 remaining species are threatened with imminent risk of extinction in the next few years. Investments under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law are already being put to work to conduct needed research, listen to Native Hawaiian perspectives, and put in place conservation measures to benefit the bird species that are most at-risk.

Capacity for Environmental Review

In addition to directly implementing conservation measures and funding under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Service also plays a key role in environmental reviews of BIL infrastructure projects for other agencies. The Service helps review projects under multiple authorities, including the Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Water Act, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Most often, such reviews constitute a small part of the overall scope, timeline, and process of an individual project, but they are critical to providing long-term conservation benefits to communities and ecosystems. Congressional investments in Service employees, like those contained in the President's Budget Request, facilitate faster and more efficient environmental reviews.

The Service receives tens of thousands of requests for project reviews every year. As multiple agencies utilize BIL funding, the number of project review requests we receive has further

increased. Since April 2023, the number of requests for consultations received each month has been approximately 1,500 higher, on average, compared to the prior year. As multiple agencies use BIL funding to pursue projects, our review workload will continue to increase, primarily through additional Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultations. The BIL does not include funding for Section 7 consultations for projects funded by Federal agencies other than the Department of the Interior, with the exception of wildland fire provisions. The President's FY 2024 budget proposes to address this increasing workload by expanding existing transfer authorities and enabling Federal agencies to transfer BIL funds to the Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service for environmental review of BIL projects. This authority would increase capacity for environmental planning and consultation, speeding up implementation of other agencies' infrastructure projects funded by BIL, and getting the economic and environmental benefits to communities more efficiently.

Conclusion

Thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Service is investing hundreds of millions of dollars into hundreds of community-led projects across the country. States, Tribes, conservation organizations, and private landowners have led the charge on identifying priority projects that their communities care about and partnered with Service employees and programs to harness BIL funds. These projects help improve water quality, keep roads safe, conserve wildlife and habitat, support jobs and workforce skills, improve recreational opportunities, and make communities more resilient to wildfires, floods, and droughts.

As we embark on the third year of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we are eager to see how these projects continue to unfold for the Service and our partner agencies at the Department of the Interior. With many groundbreaking and completion milestones on the near-term horizon, this is an exciting time for fish and wildlife conservation and for communities around the country.

The Service thanks this Committee and the Congress for making these consequential investments and welcome the opportunity to discuss our progress in implementing them.

Questions for the Record
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Hearing Entitled “IIJA Investments in Habitat and Ecosystem Restoration,
Pollinators, and Wildlife Crossings”
December 6, 2023

Questions from Senator Whitehouse:

Question 1: The Biden administration has set up a methane task force led by the Department of Justice to allow for rapid response when methane leaks are detected. What is the Fish and Wildlife Service’s role in the methane task force and how does the agency plan to tackle methane emissions?

Response: The Department of the Interior is a member of the Methane Task Force. To tackle methane emissions, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has received \$30 million through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to address 273 orphaned oil and gas wells on National Wildlife Refuge System lands so far, with more projects to come. Orphaned wells lack a responsible owner and are highly variable in the amount of methane they leak, making this federal funding a critical tool in reducing their negative impacts. The Service’s continued efforts to address methane emissions will provide benefits for the climate, air quality, and safety of the communities we serve.

Questions 2: EPA recently finalized its rule on methane emissions from oil and gas facilities. Included in the final rule is a calculation for the social cost of carbon, which EPA intends to use for all future climate regulations. Earlier this year, the Administration directed that all federal agencies use the social cost of carbon for government-wide decision-making. Now that the EPA rule is final, what is the FWS’ plan for implementing the Administration’s directive regarding the social cost of carbon?

Response: The Service is committed to reducing its carbon footprint as part of the government-wide approach to address the impacts of climate change. [A recent study](#) found that the annual benefits of the natural processes of biological sequestering of carbon on National Wildlife Refuges to be over \$976 million per year in avoided CO2 emissions. The Service is still evaluating the Environmental Protection Agency’s December 2, 2023, rule and its impacts to incorporating the social cost of carbon into the Service’s National Environmental Policy Act analyses. We will continue to collaborate with other federal agencies on the most appropriate actions to incorporate the social cost of carbon into the Service’s decision-making.

Questions for the Record
 Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
 Hearing Entitled "IIJA Investments in Habitat and Ecosystem Restoration,
 Pollinators, and Wildlife Crossings"
 December 6, 2023

Question from Senator Markey:

Question 1: By removing barriers to fish passage, the National Fish Passage Program not only helps to restore fish habitat and improve ecosystem health, it also can make rivers safer for kayakers, fishermen, and other recreational users. In addition, by removing old dams and failing culverts, this funding also helps us build better roads that won't wash out from climate change-induced extreme weather. This is especially relevant to folks back home in Western Mass, where we experienced near record-breaking rainfall this summer and millions of dollars in infrastructure damage. In Massachusetts alone, more than 400 culverts pose a "severe" threat to aquatic wildlife passage and another 178 culverts pose a "significant" threat, so we have a lot of fish passage work that is needed. With only three years of IIJA funding remaining, is more ongoing support needed to keep up the momentum and build on the success of the Fish Passage Program?

Response: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) appreciates the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's (IIJA) support for improving fish passage while building safer infrastructure for communities and improving climate resilience. Since the first year of IIJA funding availability in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, the Service has awarded more than \$73 million to 79 projects in 30 states and Puerto Rico through the National Fish Passage Program (NFPP).

Once completed, these IIJA funded projects will remove 212 barriers to reopen more than 6,200 miles of streams and rivers. IIJA funding also facilitated the Service's efforts to bring together thirteen federal agencies to form the Federal Interagency Fish Passage Task Force, which leverages agencies' expertise and coordinates funding to maximize impacts across the landscape. In addition, local economies are benefiting from IIJA investments in NFPP. For each \$1 million invested through IIJA on fish passage projects in 2022, an estimated 13 jobs were created and \$2.8 million in economic output went back into the economy.

With the remaining three years of IIJA funding, the Service will continue to prioritize investments that will yield the greatest impacts to communities and ecosystem health. However, requests for FY 2024 IIJA funding under the NFPP totaled over \$575 million for \$35 million in available funding. The unfunded needs to improve fish passage are simply greater than the Service and other agencies can address in the remaining three years. To continue the momentum and build on the success to-date through IIJA, the Service will continue to rely on NFPP, which has been a leader in reconnecting watersheds since 1999. The NFPP has been carrying out a similar mission to achieve aquatic connectivity and improve community safety with annual appropriations, working with over 2,000 local communities, States, Tribes, and private landowners, to remove or bypass over 3,500 barriers. Since FY 2020, base appropriations for NFPP have totaled \$18.598M which includes funding for projects, as well as the required technical and administrative support by agency experts. Combining NFPP's record of success with the Task Force's strengthened partnerships and strategic approach will ensure States, Tribes, and other non-federal partners have continued access to the resources necessary to address remaining barriers and improve ecosystems.

Questions for the Record
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
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December 6, 2023

These partnerships and an increase in local capacity are critical outcomes of the NFPP, and successes that IIJA funding has only strengthened through the ability to tackle larger, more complex projects. The Service would welcome the opportunity to work with Congress to ensure that the NFPP has the necessary resources to maintain these partnerships and address the continuing fish passage needs of ecosystems in Massachusetts and across the country.

Senator CARPER. I failed to actually read a very nice intro that was written by our staffs. Martha Williams is no stranger to our committee. Director Williams was sworn in as the 23d Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service I think in 2022 after serving as Principal Deputy Director since 2021. Is that true? I think that is true.

My introduction goes on to say that you bring extensive background to your role including some of the topics we are discussing today, having served as Director of the Montana Department of Fish and Wildlife and Parks from 2017 to 2020. Are you a native of Montana?

Ms. WILLIAMS. I am a native of Maryland.

Senator CARPER. That is good. That is part of DelMarVa.

You also served as the Deputy Solicitor for Parks and Wildlife at the Department of Interior. You are a lifelong outdoor enthusiast, an avid hunter and angler.

Anything else you want to add?

Ms. WILLIAMS. I hope to be able to add lots of stories I have learned from you throughout the questions.

Senator CARPER. Brian, you are up. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF HON. BRIAN FOUCH, P.E., ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR FEDERAL LANDS, FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

Mr. FOUCH. Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's investments in ecosystem restoration, pollinator-friendly roadside practices, and wildlife crossings.

I am pleased to be here today with Director Williams. I would like to thank Director Williams for the collaboration between FHWA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Wildlife Crossing Pilot program is a safety focused program with the goals of protecting motorists and wildlife by reducing the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions and, in carrying out that purpose, improving habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species.

The program represents an unprecedented effort to make roads safer while protecting wildlife as it creates a dedicated source of funding for wildlife crossing projects. At DOT and FHWA we recognize the importance of wildlife crossing projects.

Earlier this year, Secretary Buttigieg visited a wildlife crossing in New Mexico where they announced details for the new Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program. Earlier this week, FHWA was pleased to announce award selections for the first round of funding under this program, announcing \$110 million in grants for 19 wildlife crossing projects in 17 States, including four Indian tribes.

FHWA Administrator Shailen Bhatt was in Arizona yesterday to announce the award of \$24 million to the Arizona Department of Transportation for the InterState 17 Munds Park to Kelly Canyon Wildlife Overpass Project. The project will reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions along I-17, while increasing habitat connectivity for local species, particularly the elk.

Safety is FHWA's No. 1 priority. The Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program will improve the safety of our Nation's roadways by preventing dangerous wildlife-vehicle collisions, improving the overall safety of the traveling public and reducing the economic drain caused by these collisions while some simultaneously supporting species survival and improving habitat connectivity. The awards announced this week do just that.

Roadways that cross wildlife habitats create a barrier for animals and if they try to cross the roadways, can result in wildlife-vehicle collisions. The Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program will provide more options for animals to cross busy roads without coming into conflict with traffic, improving habitat connectivity.

As required by statute, the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program projects will be administered by the State Departments of Transportation and also by the FHWA's Office of Federal Lands Highway for Tribes and Federal Land Management Agencies.

FHWA has had a long history in supporting these stakeholders with project delivery through our Federal Aid Division offices and our Federal Lands Highway Division offices. This experience makes FHWA well-positioned to administer this important program, and FHWA looks forward to supporting the recipients.

In addition to the new Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program, wildlife crossings are eligible under several Federal highway programs, and FHWA has looked for opportunities to highlight these eligibilities.

Consistent with our longstanding practice of engaging with stakeholders, FHWA developed the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program Notice of Funding Opportunity after considering input from wildlife conservation groups, foundations, tribal governments and other relevant Federal, State and local stakeholders. FHWA is also working with these stakeholders to develop guidance, matrices and best practices regarding wildlife crosses and habitat connectivity.

FHWA is committed to continuing its robust consultation with the Transportation Wildlife Conservative community to maximize the impact of programs and activities established under BIL.

The numerous programs FHWA is implementing also include the Pollinator Friendly Practices on Roadsides and Highway Rights of Way Program, a new program to provide grants to eligible entities for activities to benefit pollinators on roadsides and highways right-of-way, including the planting and seeding of native, locally appropriate grasses and wildflowers. Although not within my program area, I know that FHWA is working hard to implement this program.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fouch follows:]

Testimony of Brian Fouch
Associate Administrator,
Office of Federal Lands Highway
Federal Highway Administration,
U.S. Department of Transportation
Before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
December 6, 2023

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's investments in ecosystem restoration, pollinator-friendly roadside practices, and wildlife crossings. I am pleased to be here today with Director Williams.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law represents a once-in-a-generation investment in our Nation's infrastructure, competitiveness, communities, and resilience to climate change. This historic legislation includes the **Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program**, a first-of-its-kind pilot program to make roads safer, prevent wildlife-vehicle collisions, and improve habitat connectivity. The program represents an unprecedented effort to make roads safer in local and rural communities while protecting wildlife as it creates a *dedicated* source of funding for wildlife crossing projects, which traditionally have had to compete with other infrastructure priorities for funding. At the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), we recognize the importance of wildlife crossings projects. Earlier this year, Secretary Buttigieg visited a wildlife crossing in New Mexico, where he announced details for the new Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program. Earlier this week, FHWA was pleased to announce award selections for the first round of funding under this program—announcing \$110 million in grants for 19 wildlife crossing projects in 17 States, including four Indian Tribes. FHWA Administrator Shailen Bhatt was in Arizona yesterday to announce the award of \$24 million to the Arizona Department of Transportation for the Interstate 17 Munds Park to Kelly Canyon Wildlife Overpass Project. The project will reduce wildlife vehicle collisions along I-17 while increasing habitat connectivity for local species, particularly the elk. The Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program is a safety-focused program, with the goals of protecting motorists and wildlife by reducing the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions and, in carrying out that purpose, improving habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species.

SAFETY

Safety is FHWA's number-one priority and FHWA is committed to achieving the Department's goal of zero roadway deaths and serious injuries through the Safe System Approach as outlined in the National Roadway Safety Strategy. Each year in the United States, approximately 200 people are killed – and many more are injured – in more than one million collisions involving wildlife and vehicles. By reducing these collisions, the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program will improve the safety of our Nation's roadways while protecting wildlife. Through this program, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides resources to address this important safety issue, making a total of \$350 million available over five years. This investment will help make roads safer by preventing dangerous wildlife-vehicle collisions that can result in injury or death to drivers and passengers and harm or mortality to animals. The projects funded by the Wildlife

Crossings Pilot Program will improve the overall safety of the traveling public and reduce the economic drain caused by wildlife-vehicle collisions (such as loss of income, medical costs, property damage, and decline in productivity and quality of life), while simultaneously supporting species survival and improving habitat connectivity.

HABITAT CONNECTIVITY

In addition to improving safety for motorists and wildlife, the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program aims to improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species. Roadways that cross wildlife habitats create a barrier for animals and, if they try to cross the roadways, can result in wildlife-vehicle collisions. The grant funding provided through the program will promote more wildlife crossings that are built both over and under roadways, providing more options for animals to cross busy roads without coming into conflict with traffic.

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

The FHWA is working tirelessly to implement the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law so that we can deliver on the promise of this historic investment. Among the many Bipartisan Infrastructure Law programs we have stood up in the past two years, FHWA is implementing the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program and improving wildlife crossing safety. In April 2023, the FHWA issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) making up to \$111.85 million from Fiscal Year 2022 and 2023 funding available for this program. The Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program provides funding for construction and non-construction projects. All projects should seek to protect motorists and wildlife by reducing the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species. Eligible entities for the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program include: State Departments of Transportation, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, units of local government, regional transportation authorities, special purpose districts or public authorities with a transportation function, Indian tribes, Federal Land Management Agencies, and a group of any of these entities.

In response to the first year NOFO, FHWA received 67 applications from applicants in 34 States requesting \$549 million in Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program funds. This represents nearly five times the amount available in the first NOFO, and over one and a half times the amount available for the program over the life of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, demonstrating the overwhelming demand for funding of this nature. Yesterday, FHWA announced award selections for this first round of funding. Future NOFOs will provide funding for Fiscal Years 2024, 2025, and 2026. FHWA is incorporating feedback from Tribes and other participants in the development of the next NOFO, for Fiscal Year 2024, with the goal of issuing that NOFO as expeditiously as possible.

As required by statute, Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program projects will be administered by State Departments of Transportation, and by FHWA's Office of Federal Lands Highway for Tribes and Federal Land Management Agencies. FHWA has a long history of supporting these stakeholders with project delivery through our Federal-aid Division Offices and Federal Lands Highway Division Offices. This experience makes FHWA well-positioned to administer this important program and FHWA looks forward to supporting recipients.

In addition to the new Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program established by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, wildlife crossings are eligible under several Federal highway programs, including the **Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program, Highway Safety Improvement Program, Federal Lands Transportation Program, Federal Lands Access Program, and Tribal Transportation Program**, and FHWA has looked for opportunities to highlight these eligibilities, including specifically mentioning eligibility for wildlife crossing structures in the STBG program guidance.

Currently, the Office of Federal Lands Highway is delivering a dedicated wildlife overpass project in Idaho for the Idaho Transportation Department, using Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) funds. FHWA's Wyoming Division is supporting a wildlife crossings project for which the U.S. Department of Transportation awarded a Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant.

WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The FHWA has a longstanding practice of engaging with stakeholders across the country, and we have placed an even greater emphasis on these efforts since the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. FHWA developed the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program NOFO after considering input from wildlife conservation groups, foundations, Tribal governments, and other relevant Federal, State, and local stakeholders. FHWA has worked closely and collaboratively with the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to tap its ecological and transportation expertise on wildlife needs and data collection. In the spirit of President Biden's whole-of-government approach, we have mapped an approach where FHWA can, and will continue to, leverage the Service's extensive knowledge on habitat connectivity and conservation while also ensuring the integrity of the competitive grant process, considering the Service is an eligible applicant.

FHWA is also working with these stakeholders to develop guidance, metrics, and best practices regarding wildlife crossings and habitat connectivity as required by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. FHWA is committed to continuing its robust consultation with the transportation and wildlife conservation community to maximize the impact of the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program and other activities established under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

To allow for a better understanding of the program, FHWA hosted two informational webinars for the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program NOFO providing information to assist applicants interested in applying—a public webinar and a webinar specifically for Tribes. In addition to standing up the new Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program, FHWA has been working to make stakeholders aware of eligibility for wildlife crossings under other programs. FHWA will continue its focus on stakeholder engagement as we implement this program.

POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY PRACTICES ON ROADSIDES AND HIGHWAY RIGHTS-OF-WAY

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law also established the Pollinator-Friendly Practices on Roadsides and Highway Rights-of-Way program, to provide grants to eligible entities for

activities to benefit pollinators on roadsides and highway right-of-way, including the planting and seeding of native, locally-appropriate grasses and wildflowers. Congress provided funding for this new program in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023. FHWA is working to implement this program as expeditiously as possible.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Hearing Entitled “IIJA Investments in Habitat and Ecosystem Restoration, Pollinators, and
Wildlife Crossings”
December 6, 2023
Questions for the Record for Associate Administrator Fouch

Chairman Carper:

1. The last time Congress received a complete analysis on the issue of wildlife-vehicle collision reduction was over 15 years ago. Since then, we have learned much more about opportunities to address this challenge for public health and wildlife safety. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law directed the Federal Highway Administration to submit a new report to Congress on this topic within 18 months of its passage. What are you learning from this new study and when can we expect to receive this report?

FHWA is working diligently to develop this report and improve wildlife crossing safety. Pursuant to requirements in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, FHWA has conducted consultations with stakeholders through workshops and is working to complete the required study on the state of the practice of methods to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs). FHWA plans to solicit input on the findings of the study from Federal, Tribal, state, academic, and other experts in the field of WVCs and the effects of roads and traffic on habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species. FHWA is aiming to have the study completed by the end of calendar year 2024. After the study is completed, FHWA will prepare a report to Congress on the results of the study.

2. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law tasked the Federal Highway Administration with creating a workforce development and technical training program on methods to reduce wildlife vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity. Would you provide an update on the agency's efforts to develop this program?

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law requires that, based on the study described above, FHWA develop workforce development and technical training courses to reduce WVCs and improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species. Therefore, the courses cannot be fully developed until that study is complete. FHWA has completed a preliminary plan to develop these courses once the information from the study is available. FHWA sees opportunities to partner with other Federal agencies, including the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the United States Forest Service (USFS), and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in workforce development and technical training required under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. FHWA has done the initial coordination with these agencies to leverage expertise and learning platforms.

- a. The Federal Highway Administration also has several other new responsibilities to consider wildlife in its programs, including standardization of wildlife collision and carcass data and national threshold guidance (23 USC 172), and considering species movement when evaluating replacement or rehabilitation of bridges and tunnels (23 USC 144). Would you please provide an update on your agency's progress on fulfilling each of these requirements?

FHWA sponsored and participated in the National Academy of Sciences Transportation Research Board (TRB) in January 2023 and the biennial International Conference on Ecology and Transportation in June 2023. FHWA hosted workshops at each conference soliciting input from practitioners on a methodology for collecting and reporting spatially accurate wildlife collision and carcass data and national threshold guidance. FHWA has drafted standardized methodologies for collecting and reporting wildlife collision and carcass data for the National Highway System. Following statutory consultation requirements, FHWA engaged with transportation safety experts in each State to complete the data collection needed and plans to further engage stakeholders on the draft methodologies.

With respect to the national threshold guidance, FHWA is developing such guidance for States to determine whether a highway should be evaluated for potential mitigation measures to reduce WVCs and increase habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species. FHWA has conducted workshops and collected input from various stakeholders. FHWA will continue to develop ideas through stakeholder engagement as we finalize the guidance.

FHWA has updated training course materials to train appropriate inspection personnel in assessing aquatic and terrestrial passage opportunities. The information was incorporated into the Bridge Inspection Refresher Course. Because wildlife passage assessments are specialized and vary geographically or biologically, the training seeks to inform inspectors of such situations, allowing them to share these potential restoration opportunities with others who have such skillsets and experience. Every bridge inspection program manager and team leader is required to complete 18 hours of bridge inspection refresher training during a five-year period. See 23 CFR 650.309.

3. Would you please provide additional details on what actions your agency is taking to utilize the expertise of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for habitat connectivity and the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program?

FHWA is engaging with the transportation and wildlife communities and has invited members of Tribes, Federal Agencies including the FWS, State DOTs, State Fish and Wildlife agencies, colleges and universities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and other experts in the field to consult on various activities and provisions related to habitat connectivity and wildlife crossings in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. FHWA hosted several workshops related to habitat connectivity attended by the FWS, including during the January 2023 Transportation Research Board (TRB) conference; the June 2023 International Conference on Ecology and Transportation (ICOET) in Burlington, Vermont; and the Annual Meeting of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) in September 2023 in Calgary,

Canada. The FHWA participates in the Connectivity and Corridors Subcommittee hosted by CEQ under President Biden's America the Beautiful initiative. The Subcommittee includes FHWA, FWS, and many other Federal agencies working together to identify opportunities to improve protection, enhancement, conservation, and restoration of ecological connectivity and wildlife corridors.

FHWA developed the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program NOFO after considering input from wildlife conservation groups, foundations, Tribal governments, and other relevant stakeholders. Given that the FWS is an eligible applicant to receive the grant funding, FHWA did not collaborate with the FWS in developing the NOFO. FHWA recognizes the FWS's expertise on wildlife needs and data collection and will look to leverage the FWS's extensive knowledge on habitat connectivity and conservation while also ensuring the integrity of the competitive grant process, considering the FWS is an eligible applicant for the program.

- a. Would you please share a bit about your involvement on the Federal Interagency Fish Passage Task Force? What steps has your agency taken to help improve coordination for fish passage efforts?

FHWA has participated in the Federal Interagency Fish Passage Task Force since its inception at the July 2022 Fish Passage Workshop hosted by the FWS at their National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. FHWA has taken multiple steps to improve coordination for fish passage efforts both within the Department of Transportation (DOT) and with other Task Force members. FHWA hosts weekly update meetings among DOT agencies. FHWA established Interagency Agreements with FWS and the NMFS to fund their assistance in the administration of the National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grant Program (Culvert Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) Program). As required by statute, FHWA has coordinated with the FWS and NMFS on our Culvert AOP program, soliciting their help in aligning and simplifying FHWA's Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs) to improve the applicant experience; participating in FHWA's grant review and selection process; providing technical assistance to applicants; and completing environmental reviews for Culvert AOP Program grants. FHWA is currently collaborating with FWS and NMFS on the development of the Year 2 (FY23) NOFO for the Culvert AOP Program. FHWA staff have also participated in FWS's and NMFS's grant program application reviews. FHWA supports the FWS-hosted online interagency Portal¹ with information and data summarizing DOT-related fish passage grant opportunities and showcasing the results of our efforts. FHWA is working with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), FWS, and NMFS to develop and implement a culvert monitoring protocol and tool to assess the long-term performance of culvert designs in providing aquatic organism passage that can inform future design choices. Most recently, FHWA sponsored and participated in the December 2023 Fish Passage Partners Workshop in

¹ <https://www.fws.gov/story/2023-04/federal-interagency-fish-passage-portal>

Charleston, South Carolina. FHWA is committed to continuing to support what has been a very effective interagency partnership.

4. Have you heard any feedback from Tribal nations about barriers or challenges they may be facing in applying for the pilot program funding? Are there ways to improve this program to better meet the needs of Tribal nations?

FHWA has conducted targeted outreach to Tribes. FHWA has leveraged the strong and long-standing relationships between FHWA's Office of Tribal Transportation and Tribes to provide continued information and ongoing technical assistance. FHWA held a webinar and listening session on the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program specifically for Tribes and attended the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society's Wildlife Crossings Workshop to provide technical assistance. Through this engagement, FHWA received feedback that the statutory match requirement may be a barrier to program participation for Tribes. There were four successful applications from Tribes in the first round of awards under the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program. FHWA is committed to ensuring that Federal funding for Tribes is accessible, flexible, and equitable in accordance with Executive Order 14112, *Reforming Federal Funding and Support for Tribal Nations To Better Embrace Our Trust Responsibilities and Promote the Next Era of Tribal Self-Determination*. FHWA also provided Tribes with information on the potential use of other Federal funds to meet the matching share requirement for this program. FHWA continues to prioritize the critical technical assistance tools that help Tribes plan projects, and identify appropriate funding sources, such as the online resource Transportation Funding Opportunities for Tribal Nations.² Further, in addition to delivering valuable training and technical assistance services on the Tribal Transportation Program (TTP), FHWA's regional Tribal Technical Assistance Program (TTAP) Centers also serve as a conduit for the advertisement of discretionary grant opportunities and may provide grant application and administration trainings along with technical assistance services that are coordinated with the respective FHWA Program Office.

Senator Markey:

1. In Massachusetts, wildlife crossings would promote health and safety for both the people and wildlife that call the Bay State home. Fast-moving vehicles are dangerous to wildlife and pedestrians alike. Crossings for wildlife are an example of a Complete Street, where roads and their impacts are designed with the safety and equity of users and all those affected in mind. Do you see an opportunity for IJA-funded projects to reconnect wildlife corridors to also help communities reconnect?

Projects that reconnect wildlife corridors have a positive benefit to the overall health of animals, people, and our shared environment.

² https://highways.dot.gov/sites/fhwa.dot.gov/files/docs/federal-lands/programs-tribal/36311/transportation_funding_opportunities_for_tribal_nations_1.pdf

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides increased support for a variety of programs aimed at reducing fatal and serious injury crashes through road designs that provide for the safety of all road users. FHWA has recently issued a resource³ that lists the many funding sources that can support safety for all. FHWA is also providing Federal highway recipients with technical assistance to support the context-sensitive planning and development of complete streets, and this can be helpful in reducing crashes involving wildlife.

Crossing structures that are used by both wildlife and humans can be less effective for wildlife movement because the presence of humans can inhibit usage by wildlife. Wildlife and transportation professionals should work collaboratively on wildlife crossing projects to determine the appropriate approach to best meet the needs for people and wildlife on individual projects.

2. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation recently identified potential candidates for wildlife crossings that could receive Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding, including a proposed Appalachian Trail crossing over busy I-90. This project would double as a wildlife and pedestrian crossing, helping protect animals like the black bear, moose and bobcat, while also keeping hikers, mountain bikers, and drivers safe from life-threatening collisions. The incredible work underway in Massachusetts demonstrates our great commonwealth's commitment to providing safe passage for all, especially as climate change continues to exacerbate threats to vulnerable species. With many exciting projects in the pipeline, Massachusetts could stay pretty busy over the next decade, and we're not alone—with five times more funding requested by states than what is available, the program is clearly in high demand. In your opinion, do you believe that the Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program should be made permanent with additional funding to meet the needs of Massachusetts and other eligible applicants?

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides up to \$350 million for the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program over 5 years (Fiscal Years 2022-2026). This is a first-of-its-kind pilot program to make roads safer, prevent wildlife-vehicle collisions, and improve habitat connectivity. The response to the first Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program NOFO demonstrated substantial demand for funding wildlife crossings across the country. In response to that NOFO, FHWA received 67 applications from applicants in 34 States requesting \$549 million in Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program funds.

As the requests for funding far exceeded the nearly \$112 million available for the first round NOFO, FHWA expects there will continue to be strong interest in the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program in future rounds. FHWA looks forward to continuing the pilot's success.

³ https://highways.dot.gov/sites/fhwa.dot.gov/files/2023-10/complete_streets_poster_funding_safety_for_all_09132023.pdf

3. It's important that we don't create more disconnected habitats while working to reconnect the corridors we already broke. Is the Federal Highway Administration considering habitat connectivity considerations and climate resiliency in its everyday operations, including as metrics in inspections?

FHWA is making efforts to change the state of practice to incorporate habitat connectivity and resiliency in transportation infrastructure. More resilient infrastructure better accommodates terrestrial and aquatic organism passage and facilitates larger, more resilient species populations. Changing decades-old practices will take time. FHWA is committed to working with Federal, Tribal, State, and local stakeholders to assess existing programs, regulations, policies, and guidance to improve habitat connectivity and climate resiliency considerations in everyday operations.

FHWA is working to identify best practices for preventing WVCs and improving habitat connectivity, as required by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and is also developing training on methods to reduce WVCs and improve habitat connectivity as required by statute (23 U.S.C. 172). FHWA is currently incorporating habitat connectivity into the Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program as performance metrics for grant agreements. FHWA has also incorporated wildlife passage assessments into the Bridge Inspection Refresher Course to identify potential restoration opportunities. FHWA has updated training course materials to train appropriate inspection personnel in assessing aquatic and terrestrial passage opportunities. Because wildlife passage assessments are specialized and vary geographically or biologically, the training seeks to inform inspectors of such situations, allowing them to share these potential restoration opportunities with others who have such skillsets and experience. Every bridge inspection program manager and team leader is required to complete 18 hours of bridge inspection refresher training during a five-year period. See 23 CFR 650.309. FHWA also participates in the 13-member Federal Interagency Fish Passage Task Force which promotes the benefits of fish passage projects, provides technical advice and capacity across federal agencies, and better coordinates funding, creating transformational impact across the landscape.

Senator CARPER. Thank you.

Ms. Williams, you were originally from Montana or Maryland?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Originally, Maryland. But I lived in Montana for over 30 years.

Senator CARPER. That is a long time.

Where are you from?

Mr. FOUCH. I grew up in the southwestern part of Virginia in Richlands, Virginia.

Senator CARPER. How far is that from Danville?

Mr. FOUCH. From Danville, that is probably a two and a half hour trip.

Senator CARPER. My sister and I grew up there. When I heard your accent, I thought I had heard that one before as a kid growing up.

You have been in your current role for a couple of months?

Mr. FOUCH. Yes.

Senator CARPER. Any first impressions?

Mr. FOUCH. It is a wonderful program at Federal Highways. Some of my first impressions are the great stakeholder relationships, we have with our Federal land management agencies like U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the National Park Service. Our collaboration and how we work together has been really impressive.

Senator CARPER. Tell us a little bit about what you were doing it FHWA for the last 25 years?

Mr. FOUCH. For the last 25 years, I have been involved with many programs with Federal Highways. My very first assignment with Federal Highways was with Federal Lands, where I had a project that I helped manage in Yellowstone National Park. You can imagine starting out in a program where your first assignment is to live in Yellowstone National Park for 6 months.

Senator CARPER. A tough assignment.

Mr. FOUCH. That was something. That was a great experience.

Senator CARPER. That is great. Let me ask you a couple of other questions.

How has the Federal Highway Administration consulted with other agencies and State experts in standing up the Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program? How does the Federal Highway Administration plan to continue leveraging this expertise going forward?

Mr. FOUCH. Thank you, Senator, for that question.

We have hosted several webinars and listening sessions for the Wildlife Crossing Program with our stakeholders. We held two webinars. One was for the general public and one just for tribes to assist in applications, the application process, and answering questions that might be pertaining to the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

We also held two listening sessions, one for the general public and one specifically for tribes as well, to capture feedback on the application process so that we can improve it in the next round when we have it in Fiscal Year 2024.

As we have worked on these, we have collaborated with our stakeholders, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Conservation groups. We actually received several letters from non-government organizations, conservation groups, hunting and angling groups, as well as letters from U.S. Fish and Wildlife on ways we can imple-

ment this program and meeting with them to have discussions about how best to implement these programs.

We also have several other provisions in BIL we will be working on as well, including best practices, training and development for these programs. We will continue to collaborate with all these stakeholders as we move forward in working on these.

Senator CARPER. Good, thanks.

Director Williams, would you take a couple of minutes to share with us some details about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's efforts to address habitat connectivity and any ideas that you might have for Federal Highway Administration as it continues to implement the pilot program?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you for that question, Chairman Carper. I think that connectivity corridors and these projects are all very important. Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, at the Fish and Wildlife Service, we have been very focused on ecosystem restoration and how that relates to connectivity.

An example of that would be the Fish Passage Program that is really focused on connecting that fish habitat. By doing so, it is providing real impacts to communities, jobs, flood safety, water security, and recreational safety as well, including addressing fish.

I bring the Fish Passage Program up as an example of connectivity because I believe that the work the Fish and Wildlife Service has done with the Fish Passage Program in coordinating with over 13 other agencies that are much larger than the Fish and Wildlife Service and have much larger budgets, we have found our superpower at the Fish and Wildlife Service of bringing together and coordinating with other agencies so that we all do better work on the ground and sequence that work.

Translating then that to wildlife crossings, they are incredibly important. As you have learned through the hearing on corridors and migration, these crossings are critical to so many different species.

Our work, in coordination with my colleague and our colleagues at Federal Highways, it is also important that we share our knowledge, our expertise, and we coordinate. In this instance, we did coordinate early on, but then also the Fish and Wildlife Service applied for one of these grants. We were very pleased to receive one at Laguna Auquishcocha National Wildlife Refuge for Ocelot Crossing. So the crossings, migration corridors and connectivity are all three very important to the work the Fish Wildlife Service does.

Senator CARPER. Thank you.

Senator CAPITO.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you.

Director Williams, I want to followup on that last question.

My first question was going to be are wildlife crossings eligible under existing Interior programs. I think you answered that, but if you would just kind of flesh that out.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you for asking that, Senator Capito, because, wildlife crossings, this program through BIL, is incredibly important to the Fish and Wildlife Service and Interior for wildlife crossings because while we have other programs and can put money toward crossings, we use those programs for other services as well. The funding available is very small compared to what is

available through this grant program that is specific to wildlife crossings only.

Senator CAPITO. When we talked earlier in the week, I appreciate the phone call, and you mentioned it again, I expressed a lot of surprise that a Federal agency was getting a grant from another Federal agency. It sounds a little conflicted to me.

How do you see that from your perspective? Do you review these applications or are they all reviewed over at Highways?

Ms. WILLIAMS. That is a very good question, Senator Capito. Actually, after speaking with you, I looked into this further and had some similar questions.

This is why we did not consult more with Federal Highways as you were putting the program together. We consulted some, but we did not sit in on the grant review process because we would not want to review where we have applications for the grants themselves.

We helped coordinate early on, but after that, have been very careful to leave space between that and not seem like we are looking at our own grant proposals.

Senator CAPITO. Mr. Fouch, let's talk about that. Were there other agencies, Federal agencies, that applied for these grants of the 19 or is that one of the 19 that you talked about?

Mr. FOUCH. These grants were available to all Federal land management agencies. So it was available to other agencies.

Senator CAPITO. Did anybody else apply, any other Federal agencies, that you can recall or were they granted? Maybe that is a fairer question.

Mr. FOUCH. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife was the only grant for them, for a Federal agency. The National Park Service, I do recall there were some applications from the National Park Service, but none of those were awarded.

Senator CAPITO. OK. Does that sound strange to you, a Federal agency giving grants to a Federal agency? As an appropriator, that sounds strange to me because I am like, well, why don't we just appropriate into the pocket that the director would use rather than have one Federal agency apply to another Federal agency?

Senator CARPER. If I could interrupt.

I don't want to prolong this, but the idea of why this makes sense, my dad used to talk to me and my sister all the time, just use some common sense. May be this is a common sense situation. I think the Senator is raising a good point.

Thank you.

Senator CAPITO. We talked too about interagency coordination. Mr. Fouch, you mentioned a couple, Park Service, Forest Service, and somebody else that you coordinate with. What other agencies are you in a coordinating capacity with as you are moving through these programs so that we are not duplicating here?

Mr. FOUCH. Of course and thank you, Senator, for that question.

We have sent out invitations to consult on developing our products with the Wildlife Crossing Program and with the transportation wildlife communities. We are talking about members of tribes, we have consulted with State DOTs, we have consulted with State fish and wildlife agencies. Again, we can give consultation back to them on the Notice of Funding, but the other products that

we are working on that do not have the interest of them applying for a grant, and we work on those products with agencies like U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

Also we are talking to colleges and universities as well to get feedback on this program, AASHTO is another organization we are working with, because best practices is a big part of this program as we move forward. Those are a few of the agencies we have been reaching out to.

Senator CAPITO. In my opening statement, I mentioned the application projects and actually getting the projects out, not just out the door, but out the door and fully constructed. What are you doing to streamline that, the project grant agreements?

Mr. FOUCH. Thank you, Senator, for that question.

As you know, yesterday we made the announcement for the awards. Some of the things we are doing there are that a lot of these projects are going to be administered by the State DOTs and so forth. So a lot of the award agreement templates we put together with these groups, we are streamlining those efforts to help us get those awards up to the work quicker.

We have also established some programs within our agency. We have established a discretionary grant program team just to help us in administering these grants quicker as well. Those are just a few of the things that we have been doing to help streamline the process.

Senator CAPITO. Is the accountability on the back end in terms of how long it has taken, were you able to do the project that you said you were going to do, all of that? I am sure you do that sort of accountability as the projects are finishing.

Mr. FOUCH. Yes, Senator, that is correct.

Senator CAPITO. I have a deer that comes in my yard all the time and eats my hosta. Anything I can tell that deer to get out of my yard and cross back into the neighbor's yard, I really need.

Thank you.

[Laughter.]

Senator CARPER. Elizabeth Grace, sitting over my left shoulder, is a senior member of our staff on the Majority side. Her birthday was yesterday. She has written a note to me in response to the appropriate questions raised by Senator Capito in the last couple of minutes. I will just read directly what she has said.

She said, "There is a list of eligible applicants in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law." I see you are nodding your head, Martha. The note goes on to say Federal agencies are explicitly listed as eligible, explicitly listed in the law. This was strongly supported by stakeholders who view Federal land management agencies as critical partners.

Thank you, Elizabeth Grace.

With that, I would like to introduce the Senator from Rhode Island.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Thank you, Chairman. Welcome to you both.

Director Williams, thanks for bringing up the Red Knot and the Horseshoe Crab situation. I have traveled to Delaware to see the Red Knot land and the theory of their timing, that they get there in time for the Horseshoe Crabs to put billions of eggs into the

water for them to feed on. It is quite a remarkable achievement. They fly direct from Brazil to Delaware Bay, which is a heck of a flight for a little bird.

Senator CARPER. It is nonstop.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Yes, nonstop and then fuel up on the Horseshoe Crabs and then go on up to their Arctic breeding grounds. It is a remarkable little bird. The danger is that climate change dislocates the timing of their arrival and the Horseshoe Crabs so that when they get there, the food supply they need isn't there.

I am glad that you mentioned it because it is a coastal issue. My experience has been that Federal Government agencies tend to favor upland, inland and freshwater projects over coastal projects. The Land and Water Conservation Fund sends considerably more funding per capita to non-coastal States than to coastal States. Within the money that is sent to coastal States, a great deal of that funding is for inland, upland and freshwater projects, not for coastal projects.

For those of us, like me, from the Ocean State, what can you say to reassure us that coastal and saltwater projects will be treated fairly and not ignored in favor of inland, upland and freshwater projects?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you for that question, Senator Whitehouse.

Since I have had the opportunity to testify before this committee, it is a topic that I have learned from you and that I have paid attention to, and traveled to your fair State of Rhode Island.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. I know you traveled around Sachuest Point, a beautiful place.

Ms. WILLIAMS. It was beautiful. I was so pleased to see the project there of building an accessible viewpoint with the Great American Outdoors Act funding. It is an incredible place that demonstrates very much the value of our coasts and tidelands to resiliency with climate change moving forward.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. But smoothing out an existing trail and improving a small, existing wooden viewpoint kind of makes my point that we are really not getting much in coastal stuff, if that is the best we have to offer.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Senator Whitehouse, it is fair asking that question. I have been paying attention to our coastal program and putting more resources and support into that program that, in some respects, mirrors the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program that is more upland focused than the coastal program.

So I have very much been focused on the coastal program and restoration in these tidal areas. But specifically, your point is well taken as far as specific projects in your State.

But I can say that many of these BIL projects are focused on the coastal areas and resiliency there. Let's work together. I hope to do more in your State of Rhode Island.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Yes, I hope you will keep an eye on the coastal versus inland imbalance because it is tiresome for those of us who are in coastal States.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. My time is short, so let me ask these as two questions for the record. Methane leaks are a very significant

contributor to climate change and extremely dangerous. The Biden Administration has set up a Methane Task Force led by the Department of Justice to allow for rapid response when methane leaks are detected. They have contracted with NASA so they can get real time data from satellites about where methane leaks are happening. I would like to find out about what your participation is in the Methane Task Force and where you see that leading.

The second is the OMB, some weeks ago, announced that the social cost of carbon emerging from EPA through the methane regulation was to be applied throughout all the agencies of government, including your own. I would like to see what your plan is for implementing the social cost of carbon per the directive from OMB now that the EPA rule has been properly announced and is now regulatory law.

With that, if you could get back to me in writing, since my time has expired, I would appreciate it.

Ms. WILLIAMS. I look forward to doing that, Senator Whitehouse. Thank you.

Senator CARPER. Senator Whitehouse, thanks for keeping those Red Knots in mind. They are actually one of the wonders of nature, the way they do that.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Aren't they? They really are.

Senator CARPER. It is amazing. Tiny little birds fly thousands and thousands of miles, stop for lunch in Delaware on those Horseshoe Crab eggs. Then they are on their way.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. They actually morph as they fly. It is astonishing.

Senator CARPER. Director Williams, I have a question or two, if I could, on Delaware River Basin Program. Congress authorized, as you know, the Delaware River Basin Program back in, I want to say, 2015 or 2016 and began providing appropriations about 5 years ago, I think in 2018.

This non-regulatory ecosystem restoration program has been, by almost any standard, really a tremendous success. It brings Federal, State and local agencies together with conservation partners to implement priority restoration activities within the Delaware River Basin. These projects, among other things, improve water quality, conserve wildlife habitat, increase coastal resiliency, and they benefit our environment, they benefit our communities, and they benefit our economy as well.

Director Williams, would you share with us your perspective, please, on why the Delaware River Basin program is such a great model for ecosystem restoration? How has the additional funding Congress provided through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law enhanced the program's success?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Senator Carper, for that question. I hope that I learned from you in my time, so I will think about this and try to weave stories into my responses more than I may be used to.

Senator CARPER. I told you once, I asked Bill Clinton why he was such an effective communicator. I heard him speak while he was Governor many times. He said to me five, six, 7 years ago when he spoke, he said I tell stories. He said, I weave them together and

then I use self-deprecating humor. I try to do that from time to time. Maybe too much. Go ahead.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Well, thank you, Senator Carper. When I think about the Delaware River Basin and the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act, I think about a day when I visited Wilmington this past August.

Senator CARPER. Wilmington, Delaware, not North Carolina?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Wilmington, Delaware, yes, in this instance. I took the train and when I arrived, I walked along the Wilmington waterfront with a member of my staff who I had not met before.

Senator CARPER. One of the proudest things we did when I was Governor was to transform industrial wasteland into the beautiful waterfront that it is today. So proud.

Ms. WILLIAMS. I couldn't agree more. She commented about having grown up there and how much that revitalization has benefited that community and how much that meant to her.

At the end of the walk, we walked to the DuPont Environmental Education Center, which showcased then the beauty of the natural marsh and the impact of restoration on that coastal resilience. We were there for a grant announcement and I saw first-hand how representatives from local government, a teacher, a number of teachers, an environmental group in the neighborhoods, how engaged they were in the process, in the grant making and the celebration of this grant.

They themselves held up this program as an example of what the Federal Government can do when we strive for our mission of working in a collaborative way and having these real investments.

Then the impact of the day didn't end there. We had the chance to take a boat ride on the Christina River and see the grant projects from the water and to see how the Riverfront Development Corporation had used the program to incorporate ecological benefits into their economic development planning and then to see that mix. Then also we saw pollinator gardens that were being installed by more than 20 interfaith congregations to increase wildlife habitat and pollinators, and access for recreation for their communities.

What I saw, Chairman Carper, was the benefit of this program, but also the benefit of the investment of BIL in working to restore ecosystems that then also had real and tangible impacts to the health and safety of the local communities.

What I learned in Wilmington that day, and in this area, was this also gives me hope for these Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments elsewhere in the Country.

Thank you.

Senator CARPER. Thank you for sharing that memory with us. I had been Governor about a month or two, and former Governors showed up on my schedule, and would come to visit me in the Wilmington office. They brought with them the former president of the University of Delaware. They brought a bunch of architect renderings of what an industrial wasteland could look like along the Christina River where the train station is. They said it could really be a marvelous, marvelous place.

They showed me all these architect renderings and I was just blown away. It was beautiful. We used to have bodies, they found a couple of bodies in the river and other things, it was just badly

polluted. During World War II, 10,000 people worked along the riverfront, not far from Biden Train Station. Mostly women building ships to help win the war. When the war was over, the place went to seed. People never even went down there. They didn't even know there was a river there.

Former Governor Russ Peterson, a great environmentalist, later ended up heading up CEQ under I think President Nixon and President Ford, they presented this incredible transformation and the architect renderings. I was blown away.

I said to Governor Peters, who is going to do this? Who is going to make this happen? They said, you are. I said, why me? He said, because you are the Governor and this is what Governors do. I said, well, you are going to help me and they did. It has been a great source of joy.

Senator Capito, do you want to jump in here?

Senator CAPITO. Yes. Thank you.

I have one final question for Director Williams. We have talked a lot about the Elkins field office in West Virginia, but it is my understanding that they have a detailee from the U.S. Forest Service. Your staff has indicated that this has been very helpful in managing the backlog of Section VII consultations, but that the process to execute the Memorandum of Understanding to secure a detailee can be very lengthy and complex.

I was wondering if you had any recommendations as to how those processes could be expedited.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Senator Capito. I also want to just recognize my appreciation in working with you on these issues and your leadership. It has been very helpful in highlighting and bringing forth the challenges at the Fish and Wildlife Service where we have had declining capacity and staff and yet ever-increasing numbers of consultations coming in.

We have tried to streamline through the IPAC System, which really has made an enormous difference. In some instances, 98 percent of the consultations can go through IPAC, they can do it on the computer and move on.

For the remaining consultations, which is your question, how do we streamline having the staff there, as you know, we have done that through a combination of ways. We would like transfer authority because that helps us with Federal agencies. That may have taken a little bit to get in place, but they can last longer.

It also helps to have people from the agencies we are working with who then know the process. One way is through the transfer authority, which we are seeking. The other is through these reciprocal agreements which we have used often with external parties. Those are two tools we use.

But I would say if we had better capacity within the Fish and Wildlife Service to have adequate staff or consultations, we could do more as well.

Senator CAPITO. Let's talk about the transfer authority issue. Tell me how that works, the transfer authority within Fish and Wildlife. It is not working, I know, because you don't have the transfer authority now, but how would that work?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Senator Capito. I was smiling because I realize the challenge with moving money from one Federal agency to another.

Senator CAPITO. Right.

Ms. WILLIAMS. This would set up an agreement with another Federal agency where we have the agreement ahead of time to have staff working on consultations for that agency.

Senator CAPITO. OK. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator CARPER. I am being summoned to come to another meeting. We have other committees meeting at the same time. We all serve on a bunch of different committees. The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is meeting right now. They are voting and need me to come vote. I will be back very shortly.

Thank you, Senator Capito.

Senator CAPITO.

[Presiding.] Senator Padilla, you are up next.

Senator PADILLA. Thank you. I am glad to see this committee continuing important conversations for the benefit of our Nation's wildlife. As Ranking Member Senator Capito mentioned earlier, Senator Lummis and I held a hearing in our Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water and Wildlife last month. We had a chance to demonstrate the bipartisan and widespread support that there is for wildlife crossings, wildlife corridors, and efforts to restore habitat. I am glad to continue this conversation here at the full committee level.

Before I get into questions, Director Williams, happy birthday.

I appreciate you mentioning Lake Tahoe in your remarks earlier. I have a question on Lake Tahoe, but before I get to that, I wanted to talk about the Klamath River Basin.

As you know well, Congress provided the Fish and Wildlife Service with \$162 million for restoration activities in the Klamath Basin via the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This funding provides an opportunity to protect wildlife habitat and restore the precious basin ecosystem.

Can you just spend a minute talking about how the service has holistically used these funds to maximize restoration and water resilience benefits?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you for that question, Senator Padilla, because I do believe the investment through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in the Klamath Basin is a perfect example of how it has allowed us to look at the more holistic challenges that occur in the Basin.

So rather than being piecemeal as in the past, we are now able to look at the ecosystem restoration of the Klamath Basin as a whole so that we can develop ecosystem restoration that supports salmon, suckers, agriculture in the basin, and then also our refugees.

Senator PADILLA. Can you describe a little bit more how working with fellow Federal agencies, as well as State agencies, tribal leaders, and other stakeholders has ensured that our efforts are not piecemeal but part of a bigger vision?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Indeed. Senator Padilla, one of the benefits of having this investment is that we have used it to pull together, ab-

solutely working with the tribes in the Klamath Basin, often with very different interests. They are not a monolith. They each have their own concerns, and have been engaged in the Klamath, or have lived there for time immemorial.

It has allowed us to pull the tribes together. We have worked very closely with the State, we worked very closely with irrigation districts, we worked very closely with local governments, et cetera. We have used this investment to convene partners to recognize what is before us.

I think before now, we had to work on a year-by-year basis and plan out for that year. Now we are able to think longer term and to really address the water scarcity in the basin.

Senator PADILLA. Wonderful.

I am also grateful to the Service for your commitment to restoring our beloved Lake Tahoe. In addition to protecting Lake Tahoe from the threat of wildfires, it has been a big focus and emphasis in recent years, but for many years, removing and preventing aquatic invasive species in the Lake has been one of the highest ecological priorities for the region.

The Lake Tahoe Aquatic Invasive Species Program, which received \$3 million in the Infrastructure Law, is a collaborative effort between the Service, the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada, and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Similar to our conversation with the Klamath, can you speak to the benefits of meaningful collaboration among stakeholders, State, and tribal leaders on this particular program?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Yes. Thank you for that question again.

As I mentioned earlier in my opening statement, Lake Tahoe has often been held up as the gold standard in aquatic invasive species. However, this investment from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in Lake Tahoe has allowed us to really focus on aquatic invasive species prevention and we have done it.

It is consistent with all of this BIL funding. We have used our role as support. We are not pushing a certain agenda other than ecosystem restoration. Instead, we have pulled the community together, including the tribes here, and the Tahoe Regional Authority and other partners to hear what they feel their immediate needs are and then support that going forward.

In this instance, there are examples of permanent aquatic invasive species checkpoint stations, which is so helpful to know that they are there permanently and that the tribes are partnered in that. This is really important not only for the Lahontan cutthroat lake trout, but it is also important, obviously, for the economy of Lake Tahoe to keep these invasive species out or at least have early detection.

Senator PADILLA. Great. Thank you so much. I look forward to our continuing work.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator CAPITO. Thank you.

Senator Merkley.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman and welcome. To my colleague from California, thank you for sending me the article about it being peak time for counting the Monarchs on the Santa Cruz area of the California coast.

I had a chance to go down to Pismo Beach, another location where Monarchs gather. The Western Monarch had declined to less than 1 percent of its traditional number some 20 to 30 years ago and were down to just a couple thousand several years ago, it is on the verge of extinction.

Now we are now back up to a couple hundred thousand but still a tiny fraction of the traditional Monarchs. It is, in part, certainly a reflection of climate change, and in part, the much increased use of pesticides affecting the Monarchs and their long journey with multiple generations going north and a single generation going south.

Back in June 2022, I partnered with the Fish and Wildlife Service to sponsor a Monarch summit for us to become aware of these different factors and bring all the experts together. One of the things that came up at that point was the Fish and Wildlife Service announcing the creation of the Center for Pollinator Conservation, which I strongly applaud. It now has a director, Nicole Alt, and it has been hosting a series of workshops, which are very much appreciated. I think there is one more next week. I wanted to express appreciation that this is underway, and ask if there are some early successes that you would like to highlight related to the Center for Pollinator Conservation.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Senator Merkley, for your leadership on pollinators and helping us really put together these summits, but also the ensuing Center for Pollinator Conservation.

As you mentioned, the leader, Nicole Alt, has been terrific. We are using the Center more and more. We are really learning how to build it out and build out how we use them. We need the Center.

As you mentioned, the Pollinator Conservation Center is focused on three areas: applied science, and I say that purposely because it is applied science, not science for science sake, but learning how to apply it for pollinator conservation, collaboration and engagement.

As you mentioned, we have been working with the Monarch Joint Venture and many others, but the next and last workshop I believe will be next week. From that, I am looking forward to what they are calling an action plan that will really finalize what steps we will take next and who will do them.

In addition to that, I just convened a leadership summit for Monarchs in Minneapolis using the Center for Pollinator Conservation to pull it together and to recognize, in concert with the other Federal agencies, how do we really make a difference for pollinator conservation well beyond what the Fish and Wildlife Service can do alone. That center is very helpful in pulling those efforts together.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you. I will look forward to seeing what the action plan looks like. We are understanding better some of the challenges and some of the opportunities. One of the opportunities is to do a lot more planting pollinator-friendly plants, both for nectar in the case of Monarchs, and milkweed for the caterpillars.

I wanted to turn to you, Administrator Fouch. In your testimony, you State that FHWA is working to implement a program as expeditiously as possible. The program we are referring to is the Pollinator Friendly Practices on Roadsides and Highway Right-of-Way.

This began with a conversation I had with former Senator Lamar Alexander whose State had developed a pollinator plot program along its State highways. It seemed like what he did in his home State or what his State did, seems like we could replicate that. I first asked Administrator Bhatt about the status of this program in June in this very room. I was told it would be expeditiously stood up.

And yet still no sign of progress. This isn't that complicated. Three million dollars was allocated. I think, under even a continuing resolution, we would have another \$3 million, grants limited to \$150,000, to enable groups to establish significant pollinator-friendly plots along highways.

Sometimes it is just unacceptably slow in terms of how quickly the gears of government turn and we are really facing a pollinator Armageddon. We have lost such a huge volume of insects over my lifetime.

Many people will refer to it in different ways, but I know a number of folks have told me they can identify with the experience I had of when I drove with my family, when I was a little kid, every single stop we had to clean off massive amounts of insects off the windshield. Now, if there is one insect on the windshield, it is a surprise. We have lost a massive amount.

Why can't we speed up this strategy of establishing pollinator plots along the highways? Or tell me that you are now happy to inform me that it is all in gear, it is all designed, it is going to be rolled out, you are taking action, and we will see results.

Mr. FOUCH. Thank you for that question, Senator. Yes, this is a very important program. FHWA has been working expeditiously to implement this program.

We do expect to get the Notice of Funding out soon. That program is handled in our Environment and Planning office. That is outside of my office. But as far as the status and progressing forward, we can continue to provide you updates for that.

Senator MERKLEY. It is a totally unacceptable answer. It is outside your jurisdiction. So in that sense, it is an acceptable answer. But you are evaluating what the other unit is doing, saying it is expeditious. It is not expeditious. And happy words about, someday, it is expeditious or something will happen soon, no. The type of answers we need are here are the five steps we have taken, here are what our remaining challenges are, and here is the timeline for getting them done.

That is the type of answer we want to hear when we ask about the development of a program, not some vague, we are expeditiously working, we are sincerely undertaking, all those words. Those words mean nothing.

Where are the action steps? Where do they stand? Why can't we see this rollout? Are there obstacles we need to solve? When it comes to programs like this, given that we have States that have undertaken programs like this, they should be able to get it done.

So I want to send back, even though it is not your jurisdiction, I want to send back as strongly as possible that this is the type of program that can be implemented. Please, next time I hear about it, tell me the steps taken, the remaining steps being taken,

the schedule to roll it out, when that is happening, or if there are obstacles, what are they so we can try to solve them.

Mr. FOUCH. We will be glad to get that information to your office. Senator CARPER.

[Presiding] Mr. Fouch, Senator Merkley was not in the room when I asked you how long you had been in your position. How long has it been?

Mr. FOUCH. In my current position, a month or so, since October.

Senator CARPER. A month or so. Next time, we will expect more.

Senator MERKLEY. Point taken that this was outside your jurisdiction. I am really just sending back a message of general frustration.

Mr. FOUCH. I can do that.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you.

Senator CARPER. Good. Message sent.

Senator RICKETTS, good morning. How are you?

Senator RICKETTS. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator CARPER. Good to see you and you are recognized. Thank you for coming.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having this hearing, and Ranking Member Capito.

The 30x30 Initiative by the Biden Administration aims to preserve 30 percent of the land and waters in the United States by the year 2030. This is far from a new or novel overreach. Since the Wilderness Act of 1968, Congress has passed 120 new laws, resulting in the creation of 803 wilderness areas totaling approximately 117 million acres.

During the Obama-Biden Administration, a precedent was set for misuse of the national monument designations. The Antiquities Act was employed to unilaterally designate or expand 34 national monuments, covering an extensive 553,550,000 acres of land and water.

Building on this legacy, the Biden Administration has continued this effort. They have issued five new monument designations, and they have effectively locked up nearly 2 million acres of land.

Ms. Williams, the last time you were in front of this committee, you were unable to specify the congressional Act that authorizes the 30x30 egregious land grab. That is because there is no congressional authority. There is still no clear definition of conservation. It has led to uncertainty and instability for private landowners.

The Administration has consistently neglected to specify whether working lands, conservation, multiple use and active management will be considered as part of the conservation criteria for 30x30. Numerous congressional oversight inquiries have gone unanswered. It has contributed to a State of confusion and uncertainty regarding the 30x30 Initiative.

True conservation is sustaining land for working land purposes. It is my belief that private landowners are the best stewards of our lands. Nebraskans are a prime example of this. Nebraskans have demonstrated that landowners can effectively balance the productive use of their land with conservation efforts.

Nebraska is a national leader for acres utilizing no till practices on farms. Our agricultural producers are voluntarily making decisions. They don't need the Federal Government coming in and tell-

ing them how to do their business. These stakeholders and communities should instead be utilized for their knowledge.

Studies have shown that critical habitat designations can reduce land values by up to 30 percent. Landowners are then left with no compensation. Rural communities rely on land values for property taxes. These funds then support education, infrastructure and other essential services. But when you reduce that, obviously that reduces the ability of local communities to provide those services.

A prime example of this is what has happened to communities following the listing of the Northern Spotted Owl as an endangered species by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The critical habitat designation was followed by declining timber sales. Because of Federal bureaucrats' unilateral action, rural counties saw their tax base was limited by the growing amount of Federal land. As a result, Congress had to pass the Secure Rural Schools Program.

A portion of the Forest Service funds generated through grazing, timber production and other special use permits are distributed to eligible counties. These communities now rely on these funds to maintain local roads and schools, all because of Federal bureaucrats' action to cut their tax base. While programs like Secure Rural Schools provide important support for rural communities, the fact remains that this was a solution that had to be created because of a government fabricated problem.

Inflation has hit rural communities harder than others. The Federal Government butting out and allowing them to responsibly manage their land and natural resources will allow communities to be more resilient in depressed economic times. These stakeholders and communities should be utilized for their knowledge and passion for land, not held to the fire by Federal oversight.

Ms. Williams, how does the Service collaborate with private landowners to incorporate those perspectives and local knowledge into conservation strategies rather than imposing top-down measures?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Senator Ricketts, for that question. This is work that I have long been engaged in, well before this position with the Fish and Wildlife Service. I can give an example with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, where we work with ranchers and partners to hear what they want in their location, and then provide technical expertise to apply for grants that would work for them.

There is an example of how we work with private landowners in your State of Nebraska where, through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, we worked with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission using \$4 million in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grant funding to implement just what you have asked, voluntary, incentive-based programs to promote vibrant grasslands with ranching communities.

I would answer that we have long understood that the best conservation is that that is locally led where we learn from the community, and when we are working with private landowners, absolutely voluntary and incentive based.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Ms. Williams.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Senator CARPER. Thank you for a good question and for a thoughtful answer. If you have another question, you are welcome. Thanks again for joining us today.

I have a couple more questions. One or two of our members are trying to get here from other committee meetings. We will see if they can do that. I hope so.

My next question deals with working with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The Fish and Wildlife Service partners with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to administer some of its grant programs, including programs funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

We heard very positive feedback from stakeholders about working with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. My question, Director Williams, would be, how does partnering with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation expedite the disbursement of grant funding, and how does it help leverage private investments to match those Federal dollars? Does the Fish and Wildlife Service still retain a role in grant administration when it is partnering with the Foundation?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Chairman Carper, for that question. I think this follows nicely from Senator Ricketts' question as well.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has long partnered with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, a very important partner to us. The value that the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation brings to the table is that they can coordinate with other Federal agencies and can have more one-stop shopping so that they are working with us.

But also, these other Federal agencies bring in local partners and leverage money. Typically when we work with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, they are able to leverage the Federal money to get more conservation on the ground. They are very adept at working with local communities to build that collaborative conservation that we are all talking about.

As an example, Senator, in your backyard for the Delaware River Basin, the Fish Wildlife Foundation has leveraged more than one to one for each Federal dollar that goes through them for these ecosystem restoration projects.

Senator CARPER. I am going to ask a related question. Not everyone who is in the room or may be watching this remotely knows about the Fish and Wildlife Foundation, its genesis, where did it come from, how long has it been around. For somebody who knows nothing about it, how would you describe it? Give us a little primer on it, please.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you. It is a statutorily created foundation to aid both the Fish and Wildlife Service and also the National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, its two primary partners and they partner well beyond the Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA. It was instrumental in working on the oil spill, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and building out the ecosystem restoration efforts in that area. They work across the Country and somewhat globally as well.

I have the pleasure of sitting on the board and working with those board members. It is very well run, it is very efficient, and they have terrific expertise.

Senator CARPER. Good answer. Thanks very much. You serve on the board?

Ms. WILLIAMS. I do, Chairman.

Senator CARPER. From day one in your job?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Yes.

Senator CARPER. OK, good.

I have a different kind of question, one that deals with threatened and endangered species. I am going to start off, Mr. Fouch, with you and ask you to respond to the question first. Then we will turn back to Ms. Williams. Maybe I will flip that and start with you, Director Williams.

Your agency is tasked with recovering our Nation's threatened and endangered species, as we know. Mr. Fouch your agency reported, I think in 2008, about 15 years ago, that wildlife-vehicle collisions are a major threat to the survival of at least 21 species.

Let me say that again. That is pretty eye opening. Your agency reported in 2008 that wildlife-vehicle collisions are a major threat to survival of at least 21 species.

I am going to ask both of you, Ms. Williams, you can lead off if you want, but will you both share with us how the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments in ecosystem restoration and habitat connectivity will help imperiled species? Would you like to go first?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Chairman Carper, for that question, in part because it is very nice to have an opportunity to highlight the real impact that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments have made, not only in habitat connectivity for wildlife crossings and recovering species, but also for people in their communities.

What BIL investment has done is allowed us to switch our approach to take more of a whole ecosystem approach to conservation rather than just individual projects. We are able to really address these longstanding issues.

The examples for each of the areas of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law money that comes through the Fish and Wildlife Service, whether it is the sagebrush ecosystem, the Klamath Basin, or the Fish Passage Program, it really has allowed us to work with tribes, States, and many other partners to make sure that we are bringing everyone together to address these longstanding issues like water availability that helps these ecosystem functions that then also helps the community with flooding and water availability.

It has been transformative for the way in which the Service can address recovery of a species because we can better address the root causes in the habitat connectivity. That has been a game changer for us.

Senator CARPER. Good. Thank you.

Before I turn to Senator Sullivan, I am going to ask Mr. Fouch to respond to the same question, if you would. How does the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investment in ecosystem restoration and habitat connectivity help with imperiled species?

Mr. FOUCH. Thank you, Senator, for that question. The report that you discussed as part of the BIL and our requirements under BIL, we will be expanding upon that report, taking a look at best practices, and things that we can expand upon.

Also, in expanding that report, BIL is asking us to take a look at design and implementation guidelines and also to provide guidelines on wildlife fencing, underpasses, overpasses and so forth that will help that. In doing that, we will be collaborating with our stakeholders and talking about that as we complete that.

Senator CARPER. Good. Thanks. I may come back to this after Senator Sullivan asks his questions and I can followup on this a little bit more before we adjourn.

Senator Sullivan, welcome.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for what you do.

Mr. Fouch and Director Williams, thanks for being here. Director Williams, I appreciate the phone call yesterday.

By the way, I don't know if it has been announced, maybe I shouldn't, but I hear it is a special day for you? Yes, is that true? This is your birthday present, you get to answer hard questions. Happy birthday.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Senator Sullivan.

Senator SULLIVAN. I hope in the next 5 minutes I don't ruin it.

Senator CARPER. A bipartisan happy birthday.

[Laughter.]

Senator SULLIVAN. There you go.

Let me just very quickly kind of get a couple of commitments from you. These are easy ones from our conversation yesterday. First, can you just commit, yes or no, and I think these are all an easy yes. We will start the easy questioning.

Can you commit to get together with the key stakeholders, Tlingit and Haida, other Native groups, and southeast fishermen to find consensus on this very longstanding, challenging issue on co-management standards for sea otters? Can we get your commitment to work with me on that and all of them collectively?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Senator Sullivan, I was a bit worried at what your easy yes would be, but indeed, yes.

Senator SULLIVAN. OK. Then, on the Migratory Bird Co-Management Council, the issue I raised with Alaska Native handicraft issues, can I get your commitment to work with me on that one, too?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Yes.

Senator SULLIVAN. And then the Wood Bison recovery plan and coordinating efforts more deeply with my office and more importantly than my office, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Yes.

Senator SULLIVAN. OK, great.

I have these charts I think I mentioned to you. Jake here is on my team. This is going to be a little tough, but this is a chart I gave to the President of the United States in a meeting I had with him a number of months ago. This is what is referred to as the last frontier lockup, 56 Executive Orders and Executive Actions from the Biden Administration singularly focused on Alaska, 56.

Mr. Chairman, you know, I have raised this a lot. The Executive Orders and Actions keep growing. I just think it is completely unfair. I respectfully said it to the President. I was in the Oval Office and I am going to be respectful, but I said, Mr. President, if the Republican Administration came in and issued 56 Executive Orders

and Executive Actions singularly focused on shutting down Delaware's economy and access to lands, none of these we want, right? Very few we were consulted on. I said, with all due respect, sir, you would be on the Senate floor raising hell every damn day.

I am not going to raise hell here, but this is an outrage. It needs to stop, Mr. Chairman. Maybe someday we can have a hearing on this.

Director Williams, I did compliment you on your use of indigenous knowledge on the Southeast Alaska Wolf Endangered Species Act decision. I want to thank you for that.

But what I am concerned about is the lack of consultation with Alaska Natives, particularly Alaska Natives who live in the area. I am talking about North Slope Borough, National Petroleum Reserve, Alaska, ANWR.

As you and I discussed, there has been no consultation with these great Americans on huge issues. They have tried to meet with Secretary Haaland seven times. She doesn't meet with them. These are the borough-elected representatives, the tribal representatives, and the Alaska Native Corporation representatives. Look, it is an insult, it is an outrage. You and I had a long discussion about this. They were in town 2 weeks ago and held a big press conference. Their voices are being canceled.

They listen to the lower 48 environmental groups, what our Alaska Native people call the eco-colonialists, meaning these lower 48 groups come up, condescendingly pat the Alaska Native people who have been living in Alaska for thousands of years on the head, and tell them what is good for them. It is an outrage. Those people get listened to, but the people who live there don't.

Can you commit to me to doing a much better job on consultation before decisions are made? It is your job. It is in the law. It is unequivocally not happening, as you and I discussed.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Senator Sullivan, I can commit to consultations before decisions are made. Where we don't agree, I believe that we have changed in the State of Alaska in my choosing Sara Boario as our Regional Director, as I have traveled to the Village of Kaktovik and also met with the North Slope Borough, have been to King Cove, and spent the night at a fish camp on the Yukon River this summer.

I can do more and more. We will always strive to do it. But indeed, we are really trying to pay attention to the voices of Alaskans.

Senator SULLIVAN. OK. Mr. Chairman, sorry. I am going to go over my time a little bit. This is really important to me and more importantly, to my constituents.

I think you need to give special consideration to the people who live in the region in which you are taking these dramatic actions. Would you agree with that? That is a pretty easy question. The people who live in the region, who are going to be impacted the most deserve special consideration. Would you agree with that?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Senator, I would say they absolutely deserve consideration and their considerations are different. I get asked this all the time. I cannot just say one voice matters more than another. I need to listen to all voices. But they have a special perspective, absolutely.

Senator SULLIVAN. I think they matter more and, you know, remarkably, you guys aren't listening to them at all. You listen to New York City environmental groups, but not the people who live there.

Let me just ask two final questions. We talked about the Vietnam Veterans, Alaska Native Vietnam Veteran legislation. The career staff at Fish and Wildlife Service codified available refuge lands to extend this ability for these great Vietnam Vets, heroic, who weren't treated well, you and I talked about this, when they came home from Vietnam.

Can I get your commitment that if the legislation I introduced has the very lands that your staff proposed to get your support on that?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Senator Sullivan, I would be happy to work with you on that.

Senator SULLIVAN. OK.

Then finally, give me and this committee an update, if you wouldn't mind, on the King Cove Road. Mr. Chairman, I think you are aware that we have been trying to get an 11-mile, single lane dirt road. Mr. Fouch, this impacts you guys too. It would save lives in the Native community. Everybody in the community, 900 people, everybody wants it.

Thirty years we have been trying to get this done. It won't hurt the wildlife there. Can you give me an update on that, Director Williams? It is something that is enormously important, not just to the people of King Cove, but the entire State of Alaska is watching this issue.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Senator Sullivan, yes. I appreciate the enormity of this and have had very clear direction from the Secretary that this is important to her and that the safety of the members of the community in King Cove, that this is important to them.

The comment period closed for the Notice of Intent, closed this summer. We are working with a contractor on a Supplemental EIS, and we are expediting that as quickly as we can. I have put resources into this matter to be able to get that out by the spring. I know that we are on a short timeframe. I commit to supporting the Secretary's commitment in this community. I appreciate its importance.

Senator SULLIVAN. So, spring is what you are shooting for as a target, spring of 2024?

Ms. WILLIAMS. To get the Supplemental EIS out.

Senator SULLIVAN. OK. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator CARPER. You bet.

Senator SULLIVAN. And Go Navy, beat Army. I am going to the game. Are you going to the game?

[Laughter.]

Senator CARPER. Whenever I run into retired Marine, retired Navy, I am the last Vietnam Veteran serving in the U.S. Senate, but whenever I come across the other veterans, I always salute them, if they have a hat or shirt on or something else. I will say Navy salutes Air Force, Marines, whatever. We have a great time. But I salute retired Army folks, saying Navy salutes Army, I say except on 1 day of the year, and that is the Army-Navy game.

Senator SULLIVAN. Are you going?

Senator CARPER. I don't know. We are trying to work it out. We will see.

Senator SULLIVAN. Well, I will see you there if you are there. Thank you.

Senator Carper. Thanks so much. I was talking earlier about the countdown of Beatles songs. One of my favorite Johnny Cash songs is "I've Been Everywhere, Man, I've Been Everywhere." And you have been maybe not everywhere, but you have been to a lot of places. And that is noticed and appreciated by me and I am sure by Senator Sullivan, Senator Capito and others.

We are close to the end, and I have another question or two I would like to share, one for Mr. Fouch and maybe one more for you, Ms. Williams.

With respect to balancing the needs of small and large species, Mr. Fouch, vehicles, as we know, pose a major threat to many smaller wildlife species. Some experts believe that over 300 million birds, amphibians and other small animals are killed on the road each year. These collisions are much harder to track, as you know.

While our roads and highways pose just as great a risk for these smaller species as they do for larger species, the habitat connectivity needs of smaller species are quite often overlooked as being less expensive to address.

My question is how did the Federal Highway Administration balance the needs of small species with the needs of large species when selecting grant recipients?

Mr. FOUCH. Thank you, Senator, for that question. The Wildlife Crossing Program is focused on wildlife and vehicle collisions. Safety is a priority of that program and one of the major priorities for that. But what we also see with the larger animal wildlife crossings, which you mentioned as well, is that animals will use it, all animals will use those crossings when we put those in.

Even though the crossings may be very focused on preventing wildlife-vehicle collisions and the safety of motorists, as well as connectivity of habitat, these crossings can also provide crossings for the smaller habitat as well.

Senator CARPER. All right, thanks. I have one more question for you dealing with the demand for funding. I believe you shared in your testimony, and I mentioned in my earlier statement the demand for the wildlife crossing pilot program exceeded the available funding by five times.

How is the Federal Highway Administration leveraging other funding sources? That would include States, foundations and maybe other Federal programs. How are you encouraging grant applications to do the same?

Mr. FOUCH. Thank you, Senator, for that question. Yes, the Wildlife Crossing Program is eligible under several programs. Some of those include the Highway Safety Improvement Program, the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program, our Transportation Alternatives Program, the Federal Lands Access Program, and our Federal Lands Transportation Program, as well as in certain instances our Bridge Investment Program and the National Culvert Removal Program.

A lot of our programs have taken into account these wildlife crossings and have made them eligible under those programs and we promote that. As you mentioned, the success we have had with the Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program and through the Notice of Funding getting in our first round five times the amount of what we offered, we see the opportunities of taking advantage of these other Federal programs too.

Senator CARPER. Good. Do you expect the demand for these dollars will continue to grow? What might we do here in the legislative branch, in the Congress, what could we do in terms of how to address the unmet need?

Mr. FOUCH. As you know, Senator, it was a very popular program. Again, hence five times the amount. I think one thing that is very certain to us all is that this is very popular and it is a great need. The funding is just part of that and it is five times the amount in the first go around.

Senator CARPER. Thank you.

I have exhausted my list of questions that I had for you. I want to give each of you a couple of minutes, if you would like to take advantage of it, to share with us any other thoughts you have that may have come to mind as you sat there and listened to questions and answered questions. Ms. Williams, why don't you share with us anything you want? Maybe you can tell us what you wish you had been asked but were not asked. Maybe you could do that. Any closing thoughts you have, we would welcome those.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Chairman Carper. I can't think of a question I wish I had been asked, other than appreciating the opportunity to highlight the value of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investment and my hope that it can continue into the future.

It has absolutely changed the game for the Fish and Wildlife Service because it has allowed us to leverage our partnerships and bring really larger entities to the table to coordinate and solve the complex conservation challenges before us. It has allowed us to really get to the to the fundamental issues, whether in the Klamath Basin, improving water availability for fish, people, and migratory birds in Lake Tahoe, working with partners and tribes to combat aquatic invasive species in the largest functioning wetland in the Basin, and that it also protects fish populations and the thriving outdoor recreation economy in Lake Tahoe.

Whether it is I didn't talk enough about the Sagebrush Ecosystem and our investments there, working with States, tribes and private landowners to manage invasive grasses, keeping water on the landscape for longer that helps keep people on the landscape and then helps the communities, and reduces flood risks as well, and revitalize burgeoning communities and economies.

Then it is tying all of these landscapes together through the Fish Passage Program. Really, I would love to be able to amplify their work and how they have pulled people together for all these really valuable resources, I think even in Appalachia going forward in these biodiversity hotspots.

So I guess it is an opportunity to say that we really are impacting people in their everyday lives. It is that resilience for the future that we have not had this type of investment in before. We take it very seriously, to get the money out the door, to be efficient and

demonstrate why this investment was worth it and that we hope to have it going forward.

I would end by saying it has demonstrated in spades that when you give nature a chance, it has a remarkable ability to heal. But we have to give it a chance. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has allowed us to do that. Thank you.

Senator CARPER. Thank you. One of the other songs on the top 100 Beatle list was “Give Peace A Chance.” There you go.

Mr. Fouch, you get the next to last word. Is there anything you wish might have been asked or any closing thoughts? Go ahead.

Mr. FOUCH. Thank you, Senator. No questions I wish had been asked.

Senator CARPER. Any questions you wish hadn’t been asked?

[Laughter.]

Mr. FOUCH. No questions I wish I hadn’t been asked. I do want to say that I do appreciate the collaboration we have had with U.S. Fish and Wildlife, particularly on the Wildlife Crossing Program and the things we are learning there.

We look forward to implementing that project and to continue to implement that project. We understand the importance of the Wildlife Crossing Program and also the importance to local, States and communities out there in providing these projects. We will continue to support this program and work collaboratively with our Federal and State partners.

Senator CARPER. Good. I will close on a musical note. We opened on a musical note in respect to your birthday. One of the songs that made the top 100 list of the Beatles greatest hits was “When I’m 64.” You are not there yet, but someday you will be.

When I turned 64, that was like last year, not really, a little further back, but we have some good music venues in Wilmington. One is the Grand Opera House. The other is the Queen Theater. We had a thousand more people who gathered at the Queen Theater, and the last thing we did was have like three rock and roll, great, best rock and roll bands in Delaware to close out the evening. Folks were kind enough to sing to me When I’m 64 which was a real treat.

Some day you will be 64. We are just glad you are here, glad you are both alive and you are doing the work that you are doing.

Mr. Fouch, you have not been in this post for very long, but it is a hugely important post.

I jotted down some notes so I could read the theme songs for this committee. One is “We Can Work It Out,” a song you may have heard a time or two, this committee works it out. We work it out. We cannot always work everything out but we work really hard for the money. We try to find common ground and believe bipartisan solutions are lasting solutions. We appreciate the chance to work with one another, especially with Senator Capito and her team.

Another thought is “Come Together,” and another Blackbirds song, “In the Middle of the Night,” is another song. I mention them because they are part of our DNA, part of our culture in this Country and I think on the planet is to say that we care. We want to work to make sure this planet will be around not just for us, not just for our children and grandchildren, but for another million years.

I will not be on this committee then but I hope people will look back in the future and say we really made a difference with the work we are discussing here today. Thank you.

We are God's creatures. As turns out all the wildlife we are talking about, the birds, animals, the deer, are God's creatures as well. We have a moral obligation to protect human beings and their lives and I think other creatures and creations on this planet.

With that, I get to do a close. I want to thank both of you, Mr. Fouch and Director Williams, for joining us today. We thank you for your service to our Nation. We appreciate very much your work to implement the provisions of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that are making a real difference for our wildlife, for our communities, and our economy. I can't tell you how proud I am of the work that Senator Capito, myself, our staffs, and bipartisan members of this committee, the work that was done on that major piece of legislation and good that flows from it.

Before we adjourn, a bit of housekeeping. Senators are going to be allowed to submit written questions for the record through the close of business on Wednesday, December 20th, which is, I think, 2 weeks from your birthday today.

We will compile those questions, will send them to our witnesses, and ask you to apply by Wednesday, January the 10th.

We wouldn't have these hearings and they would not be nearly as valuable without the great work of our staffs. I like to think that the members work well together, and rightly so do our staffs. If they didn't, we wouldn't get much done. So a big thanks to them.

To everyone, to all of you, and to your families, best wishes for a happy holiday season and a great New Year.

Thank you so much. With that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:46 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

