

TENNESSEE BIODIVERSITY: Recovering America's Wildlife Act: A Game Changer for Conservation that Includes You

On July 17, 2018 the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) was introduced in the Senate by Senators Alexander (R-TN), Manchin (D-WV), Risch (R-ID), and Heitkamp (D-ND). RAWA, as it is known, is a bill that will redirect \$1.3 billion in existing royalties annually from the development of energy and mineral resources on federal lands and waters to activities designed to conserve the full array of fish and wildlife animal species in America, specifically to implement [State Wildlife Action Plans](#).

The Senate bill complements the House version ([H.R. 4647](#)), introduced in December 2017 by Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE-1) and Debbie Dingell (D-MI-12), which has gained strong, bipartisan co-sponsorship due to its comprehensive approach to solving America's wildlife crisis. The two bills currently differ in that the House bill includes automatic dedicated annual funding whereas the Senate bill requires annual approval by Congress.

Why RAWA? Why now?

Why is this bipartisan bill gaining traction now, at a time when bipartisanship feels rare? The short answer is that the funding is badly needed, a fact that has been felt by the conservation community for years.

The loss or degradation of habitat from threats like rapid population growth and development, spread of invasive species, incompatible land uses, and climate change are real and increasing.

In May of 2018, the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) issued a report, [Reversing America's Wildlife Crisis](#), that bolsters the case for RAWA. The report cites an assessment of the best-known groups of U.S. plants and animals indicating that as many as one-third of America's species are vulnerable, with one in five imperiled and at high risk of extinction.

Additional report findings include:

- More than 1,600 U.S. species are now receiving protection under the federal Endangered Species Act, of which 442 are vertebrate animals, 272 are invertebrates, and 947 are plants.
- More than 150 U.S. species already have gone extinct, while another 500 are "missing in action" and may also be extinct.
- America's wildlife crisis extends well beyond rare and endangered species: the state wildlife action plans developed by state agencies have identified nearly 12,000 species nationwide in need of conservation action.



Cerulean Warbler, a species of Greatest Conservation Need in Tennessee (and beyond).
Photo by Ed Schneider.

- Formerly widespread and abundant creatures, such as the Little Brown Bat and Monarch Butterfly are in decline, and fully a third of North America’s bird species—from Eastern meadowlarks to Cerulean Warblers—require urgent conservation attention.
- The list of threats to wildlife is long and familiar: habitat loss/fragmentation/ degradation, disease, invasive species, pollution, and a changing climate.

More work needs to be done, and more work requires more resources

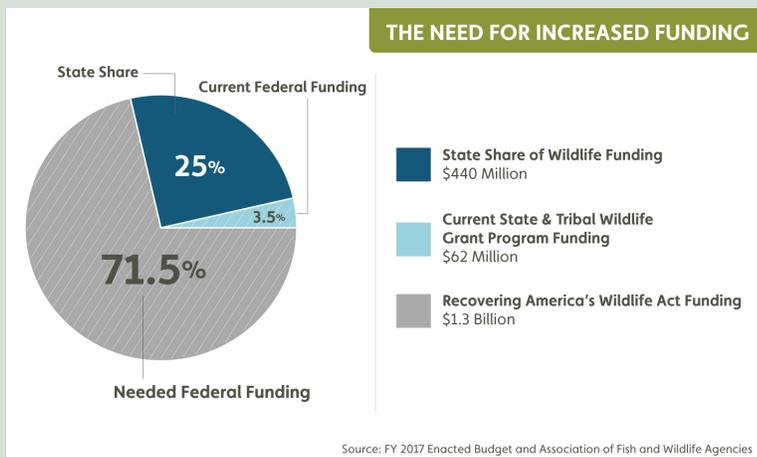
The decline of America’s wildlife can be stopped--and even reversed.

“The decline of America’s wildlife can be stopped—and even reversed. A growing body of research demonstrates that when we focus on and invest in conservation we can make a difference,” says the NWF report. This is the impetus behind Recovering America’s Wildlife Act and its progenitor, the [Blue Ribbon Panel](#), which was first convened in 2016 to address America’s wildlife crisis.

The passage and [full funding of RAWA](#) as currently envisioned would increase annual wildlife conservation funding in Tennessee from ~\$852,398 to \$20,814,645, an increase of \$19,962,247.00! An investment of this magnitude would result in significant benefits, including:

- a reduced number of species in decline
- savings on the high-cost emergency measures used to restore critically endangered species each year, which are often much more expensive than “preventive” conservation management
- a decrease in ESA-listed species
- support for America’s outdoor economy

RAWA extends the North American Wildlife Conservation model to nongame species



The U.S. has what is known as the [North American Wildlife Conservation Model](#) for conservation of game species and their habitats. It is the only one of its kind in the world. The model grew out of a realization in the early 20th century that market hunting and habitat loss had brought many formerly plentiful species to the brink of extinction, including [White-tailed Deer in Tennessee!](#) The model’s basic principles are “our fish and wildlife belong to all Americans, and they need to be managed in a way that their populations will be sustained forever.”

Conservation measures growing out of this approach include the well-known 1937 Pittman Robertson Act, which imposes a 10 percent manufacturer’s tax on hunting ammunition and firearms to be used by state agencies for research, habitat protection, hunting and recreation, and species recovery. Similar bills to support sportfish were passed in subsequent decades.

However, the vast majority of Tennessee's wildlife is neither hunted nor fished, and [a dependable funding source for nongame programs has been harder to sell](#). The effort began in earnest in the early 1990s with a national movement called "Teaming With Wildlife" (TWW). TWW attempted to apply the North American Wildlife Conservation model for nongame wildlife species by lobbying Congress to

create a long-term funding source via an excise tax on outdoor recreational equipment such as camping gear and binoculars. Although TWW had widespread support, creating a new excise tax hindered the movement's progress. A later attempt to fund similar nongame programs called the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) would have applied funds from offshore oil royalties to benefit nongame wildlife. CARA passed in the House of Representatives but failed in the Senate.

Since then, Congress has provided annual appropriated funds for activities surrounding "species of conservation need" through what is now known as the [State Wildlife Grant](#) (SWG) program. However, this program is funded at only a fraction of what states need to conserve species of greatest need. RAWA is a much-needed effort to address the urgent conservation needs of *all* wildlife species across the country.

What YOU can do

The [Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife](#) is a diverse group of outdoor recreation retail and manufacturing businesses, the energy and automotive industries, private landowners, educational institutions, sportsmen's and other conservation organizations representing more than a trillion dollars of economic impact, millions of non-exportable jobs, and tens of millions of members and consumers across the country, all who rely on healthy fish and wildlife populations.

The Tennessee Wildlife Federation is one member of the Alliance. If you would like to express your support for RAWA, they recommend:

- 1) Sign up to show your support for the Recovering America's Wildlife Act by joining the Alliance here: tnwf.org/join-the-alliance
- 2) Contact your Representative, and ask them to support the House version of Recovering America's Wildlife Act by clicking here: <https://account.votility.com/enterprise/tnwf/ec/399>
- 3) Contact Tennessee's Senators and urge the strengthening of the Senate version of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act to include dedicated, recurring, and adequate funding to keep Tennessee's nongame wildlife off the endangered species list. To get started, click here: <https://account.votility.com/enterprise/tnwf/ec/514>

People who live outside of Tennessee can use [Alliance "take action" tools](#) that make the process of reaching out to your representatives and Senators in Congress easy.

The Alliance is also promoting the RAWA bill on social media channels. Like, follow, and share the Alliance on social media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/OurNatureUSA>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/OurNatureUSA>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/OurNatureUSA/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4Fpb0z7w6FRk70OYRAjCoQ>

tumblr: <https://ournatureusa.tumblr.com/>

After taking action, keep an eye out for more materials and information on RAWA in the news, and tell your friends and family!



Everyone who cares about nature can lend a voice for wildlife.
Photo by tonyleeglen, Pixabay.