

Statement of Senator Martin Heinrich
Recovering America's Wildlife Act Hearing
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
December 8, 2021

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and distinguished members of this Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to share a few words about the Recovering America's Wildlife Act—or RAWA for short.

I've been proud to team up with my Republican colleague from Missouri, Senator Roy Blunt, on this bipartisan legislation.

And I'm grateful for the support of the 16 Republican and 16 Democratic co-sponsors, including many members of this Committee, as well as the support from the administration on this issue, including their testimony in support of the House version of this legislation.

RAWA would establish a robust and reliable federal funding stream for collaborative, proactive, voluntary, on-the-ground conservation work.

Consistent funding support has long been the missing piece in scaling up the type of recovery projects that have proven effective recovering wildlife and plant species to healthy levels.

We're just coming off of elk season in New Mexico, and my freezer is full.

But elk were extinct in New Mexico a century ago.

It is thanks to previous generations of conservationists and sportsmen and women that I have the privilege of interacting with this amazing and beautiful animal.

I am indebted to people like Aldo Leopold, Elliot Barker, and federal, state, Tribal leaders whose actions led to the restoration of elk, mule deer and pronghorn populations in New Mexico and species like wild turkey, waterfowl, and white-tailed deer all across America.

The abundance of many species that we hunt and fish today is the direct result of collaborative work inspired by those previous generations of Americans and financed by bedrock conservation laws like Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson.

Yet despite the incredible successes of these programs, particularly with game species and sportfish, and the successes of the Endangered Species Act in preventing hundreds of species from going extinct, it's been clear for decades that too many species are still declining or even heading towards extinction.

Without enough resources, our state, local, and Tribal wildlife agencies have been forced to pick and choose which species are worthy of their attention.

And as a result, more than 12,000 species are currently identified as species of greatest conservation need.

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change this paradigm and save thousands of species with a solution that matches the magnitude of the challenge.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act offers us a path forward.

RAWA will fuel locally-driven, science-based projects that will restore healthy fish and wildlife habitat and robust wildlife populations.

These projects will create substantial economic benefits, including good-paying jobs in rural communities.

They will preserve outdoor recreation activities like hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing that support millions of additional jobs all across our country.

And they will save the federal government and the private sector tens of billions of dollars by saving species before they need "emergency room" measures to survive.

Before I finish, I want to emphasize that this is not a partisan issue.

This committee has proven that we can still pass bipartisan conservation provisions within the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, in the American Conservation Enhancement Act, and in the Water Resources Development Act.

Last year, many of us here helped to pass the historic Great American Outdoors Act into law, which is already helping us tackle the longstanding infrastructure backlog at our national parks and public lands.

As one of the most important wildlife bills in decades, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act will allow us to make similar historic progress on species recovery and wildlife habitat.

I'm proud of the coalition of sportsmen and sportswomen, conservationists, scientists, states, Tribes, and wildlife advocates who are calling on Congress to pass RAWA.

I have letters of support that I would like to submit for the record representing all fifty states, Tribes, and nearly 2,000 organizations across the country, such as the National Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited, the Boone and Crockett Club, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, NRDC, the Audubon Society, and the Nature Conservancy.

I'll close by saying that I want my grandchildren to experience the same wonder I had as a child catching leopard frogs and watching fireflies light up the dark.

I hope we can pass on to them the full complement of our natural heritage—from bison to bumblebees—as well as traditions like hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing.

That's what this is all about.

Thank you.