



January 10, 2020

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman, Committee on Environment
and Public Works
United States Senate
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Carper
Ranking Member, Committee on Environment
and Public Works
United States Senate
513 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper,

State departments of agriculture appreciate your ongoing efforts to improve conservation outcomes across the country. Meeting the next generation of environmental challenges will require a robust federal-state partnership and innovative land management approaches. That is why NASDA is pleased to support *America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act*.

NASDA members and their counterparts in state wildlife agencies play a critical role in the delivery of conservation programs and initiatives. The *ACE Act* recognizes the unique role of states and mandates their involvement in policy- and decision-making processes. It also draws on successful federal-state funding models, such as block grants, to address policy implementation challenges.

Turning to specific issues, the *ACE Act* advances the priorities of state departments of agriculture in four key areas: Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) response; livestock predation issues; invasive pests management; and improvement of Endangered Species Act (ESA) effectiveness and efficiency.

First, CWD poses an immediate threat to wild deer populations and possibly domesticated Cervidae herds in the U.S. More research is needed about CWD transmission mechanisms and the potential impacts on agriculture and food production.¹ The *ACE Act* authorizes a National Academy of Sciences study on the issue and creates a CWD Task Force charged with implementing a national action plan. NASDA supports the inclusion of clear timelines for the action plan and appreciates the emphasis on building clear accountability mechanisms into Task Force operations.

Second, the *ACE Act* enhances the ability of states to respond to livestock depredation and support producers, particularly when dealing with federally-protected species. For example, enabling the

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed on December 27, 2019 from <https://www.cdc.gov/prions/cwd/cwd-animals.html>

permitted taking of black vultures and ravens during calving and lambing season will protect vulnerable livestock herds from catastrophic losses. Likewise, new state block grants will help compensate livestock producers for losses attributed to federally-protected species like gray wolves and grizzly bears.

Third, the *ACE Act* dedicates new federal resources to fighting invasive species in the U.S. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, invasive species cost the U.S. economy billions of dollars annually.² Agricultural productivity, native fisheries, tourism, and outdoor recreation can all be jeopardized, with severe consequences for rural communities.

One successful model for a coordinated response to invasive species comes from the Western Weed Action Plan for the Sagebrush Biome.³ The initiative brought together a broad cross-section of stakeholders to address ecosystem degradation caused by cheat grass and other invasive vegetation on western rangeland.

Finally, the *ACE Act* provides additional momentum for ESA efforts. A new study will investigate barriers to effective ESA implementation and explain why many recovered species have not been downlisted. The study will provide fresh impetus to comprehensive ESA legislation, which will ultimately be needed to enact a substantive overhaul.

The *ACE Act* takes important steps towards enhancing land management and improving environmental outcomes in the U.S. Nonetheless, state and local involvement will continue to serve as a cornerstone of the conservation approach. NASDA looks forward to working with you and your staff to promote environmental stewardship and conserve America's natural resources. Should you have any further questions or need assistance, please contact Max Moncaster (max.moncaster@nasda.org).

Sincerely,



Barbara P. Glenn, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer

² U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Accessed on December 27, 2019 from <https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/PythonPDF/CostofInvasivesFactSheet.pdf>.

³ NASDA 2019 Annual Meeting Policy Book. Pages 33-40. For a look at the Western Weed Action Plan. https://s3.amazonaws.com/nasda2/media/FINAL_PolicyBook_AM19_FINAL.pdf?mtime=20190816115030