

September 23, 2020

The Honorable John Barrasso, MD
Chairman, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

The Public Lands Council (PLC), the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), and the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) thank you for your continued work to modernize the Endangered Species Act (ESA or "Act") through S.4589, the *Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2020*. Your bill represents a long-awaited step forward in restoring common sense to species conservation that will ultimately restore the effectiveness of the ESA. As groups who represent hundreds of thousands of livestock producers and land managers across this country, we offer our support to your legislative effort.

PLC is the only national organization dedicated solely to representing the roughly 22,000 cattle and sheep producers who hold federal grazing permits and operate on federal lands. NCBA is the beef industry's oldest and largest national marketing and trade association representing American cattlemen and women who provide much of the nation's supply of food and own or manage a large portion of America's private property. ASI is the national trade organization representing the interests of the over 100,000 sheep ranchers located throughout the country who have produced America's lamb and wool since 1865.

Collectively, we previously offered commentary on your discussion draft in 2018 and have remained supportive of the concepts contained in the bill you ultimately introduced. Each provision in this bill addresses a key failure of the ESA that compromises species recovery efforts. As producers whose primary livelihoods are based on healthy ecosystems that sustain our livestock and our communities, we support the intentions of the ESA, despite its failings at multiple levels over the last several decades.

Natural resource management efforts, including species conservation and recovery, are most successful when all landowners and managers are engaged in complementary activities. Put simply, an ESA listing has historically been perceived as a punitive response to "failed" pre-listing conservation efforts because many of these pre-listing conservation efforts have not been given credence under the Act. S.4589 recognizes that ranchers are intimately engaged in proactive, voluntary conservation efforts that benefit species – both those imperiled and with thriving populations – far before any federal authority seeks to require additional regulatory protections. These voluntary conservation efforts are time- and labor-intensive activities that ranchers seek out for the benefit of the habitats they manage, and should be recognized for the conservation value they add. Equally, federal authorities should be able to consider the full scope of on-the-ground conservation activities when evaluating potential protections under the Act so they are best able to consider all factors when directing resources to the most beneficial use. The ESA is too often punitive and unduly burdensome for America's ranching community, so this provision is a key improvement of the most recent bill.

We appreciate the continued affirmation that wildlife management is an authority delegated to states, except in specific circumstances like those provided for under the Act. Further, the undersigned groups appreciate the recognition that the ESA provided for a step-by-step process to evaluate a

species' status, develop a plan to recover the species if imperiled, and return the species to state management once recovery objectives are met. Without question, that process has been violated or unreasonably extended in many circumstances, so the effort to codify the prioritization system and the defense of the Service's authority to work with states to demonstrate recovery during the 5-year post-delisting monitoring period is widely appreciated by our groups. Clear metrics and clear expectations are critical for success of recovery efforts and help to incentivize good-faith participation from all participants.

Chairman Barrasso, thank you for your continued recognition that the ESA desperately needs significant improvement. While our groups' collective previous comments reflected our industry's desire to make more aggressive changes to the Act, we acknowledge the need to build a larger coalition that provides for legislative success. We are hopeful that in building a legislative record on S.4589, we are able to work with the committee to ensure future implementation of the Act does not elicit the same economic and social harm for ranchers and rural communities that we have seen in the past. Strong local economies and motivated private landowners are key to leveraging success for species that are most imperiled.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you and the Committee. We appreciate the opportunity to provide our input on behalf of our members – the nation's food and fiber producers. We stand ready to aid the Committee as it works to bring the ESA into the 21st Century.

Sincerely,

American Sheep Industry Association
Association of National Grasslands
Public Lands Council
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
American National CattleWomen
Alabama Cattlemen's Association
Arizona Cattle Growers' Association
Arizona Cattle Feeders' Association
Arkansas Cattlemen's Association
California Cattlemen's Association
Colorado Cattlemen's Association
Colorado Livestock Association
Colorado Wool Growers Association
Florida Cattlemen's Association
Hawaii Cattlemen's Council
Idaho Cattle Association
Indiana Beef Cattle Association
Indiana Sheep Association
Iowa Cattlemen's Association
Kansas Livestock Association
Kentucky Sheep and Wool Producers
Louisiana Cattlemen's Association
Maryland Cattlemen's Association
Meat Sheep Alliance of Florida
Michigan Cattlemen's Association
Minnesota Lamb and Wool Producers Association
Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association
Mississippi Cattlemen's Association

Missouri Cattlemen's Association
Montana Association of State Grazing Districts
Montana Public Lands Council
Montana Stockgrowers Association
Montana Wool Growers Association
Nebraska Cattlemen
Nevada Cattlemen's Association
New Mexico Cattle Growers Association
New Mexico Wool Growers, Inc
North Dakota Lamb and Wool Producers Association
North Dakota Stockmen' Association
Ohio Cattlemen's Association
Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association
Oregon Cattlemen's Association
South Carolina Sheep Industries Association
South Dakota Cattlemen's Association
Tennessee Cattlemen's Association
Texas Cattle Feeders Association
Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association
Utah Cattlemen's Association
Washington Cattle Feeders Association
Washington Cattlemen's Association
West Virginia Cattlemen's Association
Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Wyoming Wool Growers Association