

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

[[DATE]]

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
125 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, we write to express our support for efforts to restore and protect the Delaware River Watershed. Specifically, we request allocating \$15 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to administer the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program (DRBRP).

Congress clearly affirmed the importance of protecting natural resources within the Delaware River Watershed when it passed the *Delaware River Basin Conservation Act* in 2016, with bipartisan leadership and support. The legislation directs the FWS to create and manage the DRBRP, a non-regulatory effort that leverages private investment, regional partnerships, and local knowledge to protect and restore the watershed. We were pleased that the DRBRP received \$10.5 million in FY 2022, and we hope to build on continued success and support in FY 2023. Since the DRBRP received its first congressional appropriation in FY 2018, the program has supported 123 projects across the watershed by providing \$26.6 million in federal grants and leveraging an additional \$46 million in non-federal funds. These projects will collectively restore over 20 miles of riparian habitat and 75 miles of stream habitat, conserve and enhance 882 acres of wetland habitat, restore 254 acres of floodplain, improve 22,309 acres of forest habitat and open 4,695 acres for public access.

As a five-state region that drains into the Delaware River and Delaware Bay, the Delaware River Basin is an ecological and economic powerhouse. The entire watershed serves as a primary source of clean drinking water for more than 15 million people, or roughly five percent of the U.S. population. The Delaware River Basin also supports \$25 billion in annual economic activity, including agriculture, recreation, tourism, hunting, port functions, and commercial and recreational fishing. Overall, the Delaware River Basin supports at least 600,000 jobs and more than \$10 billion in annual wages.

The Delaware River Basin also houses many nationally significant ecological and recreational assets, including the Delaware Water Gap, 400 miles of National Wild and Scenic Rivers, six National Wildlife Refuges, and the Delaware Bay, which is one of the largest systems in the

National Estuary Program. These and other systems within the basin perform several important ecological functions including air and water filtration, nutrient recycling, soil conservation, and flood and stormwater control. These benefits are critical in sustaining the health of people, wildlife, and ecosystems throughout the region.

In order to fully realize the benefits of the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act, we must provide robust support for the DRBRP. An increased investment in the DRBRP is necessary for the FWS to expand the grant program and provide funding for projects to protect and restore the watershed. As the subcommittee develops an appropriations bill for FY 2023, we urge you to include \$15 million for the DRBRP.

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