

We are running out of time to pass the Recovering America's Wildlife Act

November 7 2022, by Ezekiel Maben, Oliver Hegi, Mel Peh, and
Courtney Federico



Plains bison were successfully recovered through long-term state and federal wildlife conservation programs. Credit: [Judson Spicer/USFWS](#)

The United States faces an ongoing biodiversity crisis, worsened by climate change and the destruction of habitat. Twenty-three species of native plants and animals in the United States were [declared extinct last year](#); hundreds of others are near extinction. This grim picture spreads beyond the most endangered species: wildlife populations globally have fallen by more than 60% on average since 1970.

With the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA), Congress has an opportunity to pass the largest expansion of wildlife protection funding in a generation. The bill is already approved by the House of Representatives. If the Senate does not pass it now, it will need to be passed again next year by the House—which, as a result of the November 8 elections, may comprise a Republican majority less inclined to support conservation efforts. Thus, this is a critical moment to garner support to pass this landmark wildlife conservation bill before the clock runs out on this legislative session.

[Only 54 species](#) have been recovered from the [endangered species list](#) in the history of its existence, and this is not surprising. Existing US conservation legislation dedicates less than half of the estimated [\\$2.3 billion](#) that is needed yearly to recover the more than 1,600 species listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will help solve this gap in funding. To quote a [recent statement from the Biden administration](#), the bill would "make billions of dollars in supplemental funding dedicated to the conservation of fish and [wildlife species](#) available to state and territorial fish and wildlife managers. This will help prevent the need to list species and recover species currently listed as threatened or endangered."

The main bottleneck to wildlife population recovery is a lack of consistent funding, and RAWA addresses just that. If it passes the

Senate during this session of Congress, an additional \$850 million would be added to the conservation budget in 2023—nearly three times more than the current discretionary conservation budget of about [\\$300 million](#) this past year. By 2026, that number would top out at [\\$1.3 billion](#). This funding would be the new backbone of American wildlife conservation and would empower states and tribes to more adequately address the biodiversity problem. Additionally, much-needed funding would be allocated to clear the Endangered Species Act backlog, as well as for grants to support innovative conservation efforts.

Biodiversity loss is as much a human issue as it is an issue for the animal kingdom. The loudest voices in animal conservation are often the people who have the most proximity to wildlife. However, tribes, fishers, hunters, and wildlife enthusiasts are far from the only people who are affected by the biodiversity crisis. Flourishing ecosystems provide services that are essential to our well-being and health. Though they may not seem apparent to us, healthy ecosystems provide resources for agriculture and the economy; they regulate climate, water, and disease, and provide irreplaceable cultural value. When biodiversity flourishes, ecosystem services [grow more abundant, too](#).

Funding spent on animal conservation has been very successful in the past. For example, the plains bison was recovered from near extinction through almost a century of habitat protection and captive breeding. Today, as many as [20,000](#) plains bison roam wild and support other species of plants and animals through their vast [contributions to the greater ecosystem](#).

The plains bison example shows that long-term funding commitments are an essential component of successful conservation efforts. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act is designed to provide consistent funding for state agencies to plan and invest in general conservation projects or conserve species for the long term, before they are on the

brink of extinction. Studies have shown that [early intervention](#) is far more [cost effective](#) compared to reviving a critically endangered species whose numbers have been allowed to continuously decline. In the absence of consistent funding, conservation managers are forced to make difficult decisions, and neglect species they could otherwise help.

While the Recovering America's Wildlife Act passed the House with bipartisan support this session, it received fewer votes from Republicans than expected, with many opposing it due to concerns about spending. In a future Congress controlled by Republicans, it is unlikely that the Recovering America's Wildlife Act will be viewed as a priority. Even under a Democratic speakership, issues like the war in Ukraine or a potential recession may crowd out the repassage of the bill. The Senate cannot simply sit on this bill, confident it will return to it next year.

Though few senators publicly speak out against RAWA, ballooned federal spending and high inflation may not help with the bill's prospects. But even in a tighter fiscal environment, wildlife conservation should not be deprioritized. For one, the cost of this program is a drop in the bucket compared to the \$6.8 trillion that the U.S. spent in 2021. More importantly, the costs of biodiversity loss are immense and each year of inaction adds to the cost of recovering America's wildlife. [A dollar](#) spent on conservation today could mean [many dollars](#) saved a decade down the line.

Opportunities to transform conservation efforts in the United States do not come around every day. If we pass up this opportunity to advocate for the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, we may not get a chance again for a long time. And without a steady stream of funding for conservation, we face a future with much less biodiversity.

It is imperative that Congress take this opportunity and protect American wildlife. What we do now will set the tone for wildlife [conservation](#) for

the rest of this century. We would be foolish not to take the opportunity.

Provided by State of the Planet

Citation: We are running out of time to pass the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (2022, November 7) retrieved 16 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-11-recovering-america-wildlife.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.