February 4, 2021

Principal Deputy Director Martha Williams
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Deputy Director Williams:

We write to urge you to expeditiously dedicate U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service resources to pollinator conservation and habitat restoration. We appreciate the recent monarch butterfly status review conducted by the Service that concluded the species meets the definition of either endangered or threatened, but that funding prevents the paperwork required to complete its listing. The agency’s decision to forego listing the monarch under the Endangered Species Act is inconsistent with recent administration of the Act under which the agency has avoided almost all candidate listings in recent years. The decision to delay protections for at least another year could be the final shove that pushes the western monarch butterfly to extinction. We appreciate that on January 20th, the Biden Administration already flagged this rule as one it is putting under review.

On December 17, 2020, the Service announced that listing the monarch as endangered or threatened was warranted but precluded by higher priority listing actions. We are particularly concerned with the Service’s decision because many species on the candidate list have been waiting for protection for decades. In fact, 47 species have gone extinct while waiting for their protection to be finalized.

One of America’s most iconic pollinators, the monarch butterfly has been trending toward extinction. This essential pollinator faces growing threats from the loss of milkweed and habitat, global climate change, and disease. The most recent annual population counts show a decline of 85% for the eastern U.S. population that overwinters in Mexico and a decline of 99.9% for monarchs west of the Rocky Mountains, which overwinter in California. After two years of reaching record-setting lows of 30,000 butterflies, down from 1.2 million just two decades ago, the most recent numbers show that only 1,914 monarch butterflies were recorded overwintering on the California coast this year. In the summer of 2020, several western states, including Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada, had very few butterflies each.

The decision to delay protecting the monarch is especially alarming given that both the eastern and western populations are well below the extinction thresholds at which government scientists estimate the migrations could collapse. The Service itself has estimated up to an 80% probability
of population collapse for eastern monarchs within 50 years and a 96-100% probability for the western population. If urgent action isn’t taken immediately to address the myriad of threats the butterfly faces, western monarchs could disappear in just a few short years.

Without substantial investment in and attention to the monarch’s conservation, one storm or climate event during its winter in Mexico could result in migratory collapse. We recommend that the Service invest in science and analysis to determine the most important causes of the decline of the western population, especially on its wintering grounds. In addition, if the monarchs’ precipitous decline continues, we recommend that the Service consider use of its emergency listing procedures. To ensure the monarch does not become the 48th species to go extinct while on the candidate list, we again urge the Service to make substantial investments in bold conservation actions that not only prevent the butterfly from further decline but also ensure long-term population stability.

Sincerely,

/s/ Salud O. Carbajal          /s/ Jimmy Panetta          /s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley
Salud O. Carbajal              Jimmy Panetta              Jeffrey A. Merkley
Member of Congress             Member of Congress         United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper       /s/ Sheldon Whitehouse
Thomas R. Carper               Sheldon Whitehouse          United States Senator
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein       /s/ Chris Van Hollen
Dianne Feinstein               Chris Van Hollen          United States Senator
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey     /s/ Cory A. Booker
Edward J. Markey               Cory A. Booker           United States Senator
United States Senator
/s/ Gary C. Peters  
Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth  
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed  
Jack Reed  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez  
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin  
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich  
Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin  
Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine  
Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

/s/ Peter A. DeFazio  
Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress

/s/ Raúl M. Grijalva  
Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

/s/ Alan Lowenthal  
Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress

/s/ Grace F. Napolitano  
Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress

/s/ Juan Vargas  
Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress
/s/ Bennie G. Thompson  
Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress

/s/ Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress

/s/ Marcy Kaptur  
Marcy Kaptur  
Member of Congress

/s/ Ann McLane Kuster  
Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress

/s/ Cori Bush  
Cori Bush  
Member of Congress

/s/ Alcee L. Hastings  
Alcee L. Hastings  
Member of Congress

/s/ Mark Pocan  
Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress

/s/ Filemon Vela  
Filemon Vela  
Member of Congress

/s/ Jan Schakowsky  
Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

/s/ Grace F. Meng  
Grace F. Meng  
Member of Congress

/s/ Tony Cárdenas  
Tony Cárdenas  
Member of Congress

/s/ Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Member of Congress
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
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Sheila Jackson Lee
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Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
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David Cicilline
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Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Tom O’Halleran
Member of Congress

Henry C. “Hank” Johnson Jr.
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier
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Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress
/s/ Peter Welch
Peter Welch
Member of Congress

/s/ Albio Sires
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Member of Congress

/s/ David Scott
David Scott
Member of Congress

/s/ Haley Stevens
Haley Stevens
Member of Congress

/s/ James R. Langevin
James R. Langevin
Member of Congress

/s/ Mondaire Jones
Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress

/s/ Steve Cohen
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

/s/ Ed Case
Ed Case
Member of Congress