

7 May, 2018

Ryan Zinke  
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Mr. Zinke,

I am the president of the Raptor Research Foundation (RRF), a non-profit organization dedicated to the research and conservation of raptors (birds of prey) and am writing to explain why continuing the full funding and support of the North American Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) at the U.S. Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center is important to the conservation of the natural resources of the United States.

The RRF's membership includes residents of nearly every state in the United States and over 50 other countries, and is comprised of professional wildlife managers at State and Federal agencies, researchers at universities, institutions, and private firms, and professionals at non-governmental organizations engaged in research, public education, scientific publishing, and conservation. Our members' ability to contribute to important raptor management and research priorities is highly reliant upon the BBL, which is why we so strongly support the BBL and the maintenance of their budget at a level commensurate with their important functions.

The BBL, which was founded in 1920, is a non-regulatory Federal program tasked with overseeing the issuance of permits and bands, maintaining records of ~72 million birds banded and ~14.5 million banded birds that have been re-encountered, and ensuring birds are handled safely. They work with 3 primary constituencies, (1) bird management and conservation agencies (including the Flyway Councils, which represent the 50 US state and the 13 Canadian provincial and territorial fish and wildlife management agencies that implement management of migratory birds and their habitats across North America), (2) academic research scientists, and (3) citizen scientists.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act requires Federal oversight of the bird banding program, including the permitting of banding and maintenance of banding records. The BBL ensures that permitted banders are properly qualified, that data are appropriately managed, that stringent data quality standards are met, and that the data are provided to stakeholders for analysis and decision making. Annual bird banding data are required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in setting annual harvest regulations for waterfowl, cranes, doves, and woodcock, and for managing take of raptors for falconry, Native American religious and cultural purposes, and depredation control. Bird banding data are also instrumental in nearly every facet of bird research, from improving our understanding of the life history of threatened and endangered species, to better understanding how birds are adapting to changing landscapes – bird banding data contributed to over 1500 scientific publications from 2000–2013. The BBL also works closely with the Canadian Banding Office, Mexican government, and developing banding programs throughout the Western Hemisphere to support implementation of international treaties that recognize the shared values and responsibilities of the management of migratory birds. Efficiently leveraging from a modest budget, the BBL facilitates the work of thousands of dedicated researchers and banders, whose efforts provide myriad benefits for the American people.

Given their work load, the BBL is an exceptionally cost-efficient program and their efforts leverage the work of a large network of highly-dedicated researchers and bird enthusiasts. Our members, and those of several other ornithological organizations, rely upon the support and oversight of the BBL. We urge you to ensure the BBL's budget is maintained at a level that recognizes their effectiveness and corresponds to the value they provide to the ornithological and wildlife management communities and the American people.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

Libby Mojica  
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Raptor Research Foundation

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Mr. Reilly, Mr. Werkheiser, Mr. Devine, and Ms. Nowakowski,

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