

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 20, 2016

The Honorable Dan Ashe  
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Ashe:

We are writing to advise you of our strong support for the Whitefish Lake Watershed Project application submitted by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks for \$2 million in funding from the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. Requested funds will build on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service combined investments from previous years, through conservation easements on 6,707 acres of private land. This investment will conserve the outdoor way of life in the Whitefish area, protect critical investments in water quality for the City of Whitefish, secure working forests and protect habitat important to many of Montana's rare and iconic wildlife species.

The FY16 request will further this effort by helping to leverage funds for the conservation of the nearby Stillwater lands owned by the Weyerhaeuser Company. This remarkable 15,000-acre property hosts the same array of fish and wildlife species that merited the Service's previous-year investments in this area, and their scenic value, watershed importance (with key drainages into Whitefish Lake itself), and significance to public recreation cannot be overstated. Weyerhaeuser is making these resources available for public protection, primarily through conservation easements, if initial funding for this property can be provided this calendar year. In response, the Forest Service has ranked this project among its highest national priorities for the Forest Legacy Program for FY17, including \$7 million in its FY17 budget proposal for the Whitefish Lake Watershed Project, just as it had done for nearby Haskill Basin and Trumbull Creek in previous fiscal years.

As the Service reviews the proposals for funding for FY 2016, we hope you will recognize the surpassing value of continued investment in this area and prioritize the Whitefish Lake Watershed Project. We thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES  
U.S. Senator



ION TESTER  
U.S. Senator

  
RYAN ZINKE  
Member of Congress