Testimony in Support of FY 2027 Funding for the Smithsonian Institution, United States Geological Survey, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Environmental Protection Agency

April 24, 2026

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Submitted to:
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of appropriations for the Smithsonian Institution, the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for fiscal year (FY) 2027. We encourage Congress to provide new funding to the Smithsonian Institution in FY 2027, including at least $60 million to the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) with robust funding to support scientific and curatorial work. We urge Congress to provide the USGS with $1.85 billion in FY 2027 and preserve its Ecosystems Mission Area. We further request that funding for Science Applications within USFWS be sustained in FY 2027. Lastly, we request that Congress provide EPA Science and Technology with at least $876 million in FY 2027.

AIBS is a scientific association dedicated to promoting the use of science to inform decision-making that advances the biological sciences for the benefit of science and society. AIBS works to ensure that the public, legislators, funders, and the community of biologists have access to information to guide informed decision-making.

Smithsonian Institution

Scientific collections—and the professionals who build, maintain, and study them—are a critical component of the nation's research infrastructure. Across museums, federal laboratories, universities, and other institutions, these collections form an interconnected network of specimens, samples, and data (e.g. genetic, tissue, organism, and environmental) that provide an irreplaceable foundation for understanding past and present life on Earth. They are essential to the nation's bioeconomy, public health, and environmental resilience, enabling research that informs responses to emerging threats, food security challenges, and ecosystem change.

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) is a key federal partner in this enterprise, stewarding more than 148 million scientific specimens. NMNH is a globally recognized scientific research institution that is expanding access to its collections

through a multi-year digitization effort that makes specimen data available to researchers, educators, policymakers, and the public. However, staffing levels remain insufficient to ensure optimal care and use of these collections, due in part to retirements and constrained budgets.

The bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 recognized the national importance of biological collections by calling for the establishment of an action center to coordinate and strengthen collections across federal and non-federal institutions. NMNH is central to this effort, yet its funding has not kept pace with growing responsibilities. Continued underinvestment in collections care risks undermining the nation's ability to leverage these assets for scientific discovery, innovation, and economic benefit.

The President's FY 2027 budget proposes an 11% reduction to the Smithsonian Institution and a 7% cut to NMNH. We urge Congress to reject these proposed cuts, make sustained investments in the Smithsonian, and provide at least $60 million for NMNH in FY 2027 to support collections stewardship, modernize infrastructure, and advance critical research.

U.S. Geological Survey

The USGS provides unbiased, independent research, data, and assessments that underpin decision-making across the public and private sectors. Its science enables more effective management of water and biological resources, supports commercial activity through essential geospatial data, and delivers information that is not available from other sources—saving taxpayers money and improving outcomes.

The Ecosystems Mission Area is the biological research arm of USGS and is integral to the agency's other science mission areas. It provides the science needed to achieve sustainable management and conservation of natural resources and inform land and water stewardship. The USGS conducts research on and monitors fish, wildlife, and vegetation—data that informs management decisions by other Interior bureaus. Biological science programs collect and analyze long-term data not available from other agencies, universities, or the private sector. The knowledge generated by the USGS are used by federal and state natural resource managers to maintain healthy and diverse ecosystems while balancing the needs of public use.

Examples of successful USGS Ecosystems initiatives include the development of nationwide geospatial data products to assess wildfire risk across all lands, which are used to allocate firefighting resources and guide wildfire fuel reduction efforts; the evaluation and implementation of control measures for invasive species such as Asian carp and sea lamprey, which cause billions of dollars in economic losses to fisheries, hydropower, recreation, and many other industries; and research to better understand and combat wildlife diseases—including avian influenza and white-nose syndrome—that threaten ecosystems and can spread to livestock, agricultural systems, and humans.

The USGS also supports critical science needed to respond to a number of national and global challenges. Examples of the important work conducted by the USGS include:

- *The National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers.* This program is responsible for developing the science and tools to address the effects of climate change on land, water,

wildlife, fish, ecosystems, and communities. These centers play a vital role in addressing the impacts of unique weather patterns on ecosystem health across the country.

- *The National Wildlife Health Center*. This USGS-wide program investigates national and international wildlife health issues, including the spread of zoonotic pathogens, such as the virus that causes COVID-19. Zoonoses—diseases that spread from wildlife to humans—can pose serious threats to human health and cause significant disruptions to the economy.
- *Cooperative Research Units (CRUs)*. CRUs are located on 44 university campuses in 41 states. These research centers are a cost-effective way for USGS to leverage research and technical expertise affiliated with these universities to conduct actionable research, provide technical assistance, and develop scientific workforces through graduate education and mentoring programs.
- *Environmental Health Research*. The Toxic Substances Hydrology and Contaminant Biology programs work collaboratively with other Mission Areas, and with external collaborators to study environmental contaminants and pathogens and provide the critical science needed to help Federal, State, and local government agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders protect fish and wildlife health using a One Health approach that recognizes the interdependence of human, animal, and ecosystem health.

In summary, the USGS is uniquely positioned to provide a scientific context for many of the nation's biological and environmental challenges, including pandemics, water quality and use, energy independence, and conservation of biodiversity. This array of research expertise not only serves the core missions of the Department of the Interior, but also contributes to management decisions made by other agencies and private sector organizations. USGS science informs cost-effective management decisions, but these benefits depend on sustained, long-term data collection and research capacity.

The President’s FY 2027 budget for USGS proposes a 37% cut from the $1.42 billion enacted in FY 2026—the largest proposed single-year reduction in the agency’s 147-year history—and would eliminate the Ecosystems Mission Area entirely. This would end federal wildlife monitoring, fisheries science, water quality assessment, disease surveillance for threats like avian influenza, as well as the Cooperative Research Unit program. These are foundational capabilities with no equivalent replacement in universities, states, or the private sector.

Congress rejected a similar proposal last year. We encourage Congress to do so again and provide $1.85 billion for USGS in FY 2027. We also urge Congress to preserve the Ecosystems Mission Area and make new investments to bolster ecosystems research that supports our nation’s recreation, fisheries, species diversity, forest health and soil health, while combating key ecological threats, including avian flu, invasive species, and wildfire.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The President’s request eliminates funding for the Science Applications program within USFWS. This program coordinates large-scale, collaborative conservation by bringing together federal, state, Tribal, and local partners to set shared priorities, fill critical science gaps, and deliver data-driven tools for managing wildlife and habitats across entire landscapes. It supports pollinator conservation, proactive conservation of at-risk species, and habitat and ecosystem restoration.

Eliminating this program—alongside cuts to USGS biological research under the Ecosystems Mission Area—would significantly reduce USFWS's access to the unbiased scientific data and coordination capacity needed to effectively conserve and manage the nation's natural resources. We urge Congress to sustain funding for Science Applications in FY 2027.

Environmental Protection Agency

Funding for EPA's Science and Technology (S&T) account supports critical research to identify, understand, and mitigate environmental and public health risks. This work underpins decisions by public health officials, natural resource managers, and businesses, and provides the scientific foundation for EPA's monitoring, standard-setting, and enforcement activities related to air and water quality, land management, and human health.

Despite its central role, S&T funding remains well below its FY 2010 peak of $846 million and has declined for three consecutive years since FY 2024, reaching $744.2 million in FY 2026. The President's FY 2027 budget proposes a 32% cut, which would significantly erode EPA's scientific capacity during its transition from the Office of Research and Development (ORD) to the Office of Applied Science and Environmental Solutions (OASES), increasing the risk of gaps in research, data, and technical support. While this transition presents an opportunity to strengthen engagement with external researchers and modernize support for applied science and innovation, congressional direction and stable funding will be essential to preserve EPA's scientific capacity and maintain the partnerships needed to address emerging environmental and public health challenges.

Predictable and sustained investment in EPA science is essential, including for the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Research Grants Program, which funds extramural research that advances EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment. We urge Congress to provide at least $876 million for EPA S&T in FY 2027, including $40 million for the STAR program.

Conclusion

The unprecedented loss of biological diversity threatens human health and well-being. As the human population grows and comes into contact with new environments and species, the risk of new diseases, including zoonotic pandemics, is of growing concern. Biological diversity, however, offers a buffer against the spread of pathogens and contributes to environmental sustainability and increases our resilience to natural disasters. Robust federal investments in scientific research and monitoring that improves our understanding of biological diversity and ecosystem function must be a priority. The agencies funded by this appropriations bill are centrally involved in conducting, supporting, and using this scientific research for public benefit. Shrinking budgets and workforce for these agencies will strain our ability to address national challenges and remain a global leader in scientific discovery and innovation.

We urge Congress to uphold its bipartisan support for science by investing in our nation's scientific capacity. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request.