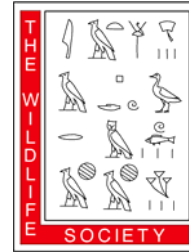


THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY ALASKA CHAPTER

1271 Lowbush Lane
Fairbanks, AK 99709-6039



June 13, 2006

Honorable Lisa Murkowski
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Restore Funding for State Wildlife Grants

Dear Senator Murkowski:

The Alaska Chapter of The Wildlife Society (Alaska Chapter) is concerned that the State Wildlife Grants Program (SWG) within the FY07 Interior Appropriations budget was dramatically cut in the U.S. House of Representatives. SWG is the only federal program aimed at preventing wildlife from becoming endangered at the state level, making it a mission-critical element of the Department of Interior. SWG provides a 3:1 match to states for proactive approaches to wildlife management and habitat conservation before species about which we presently understand little become rare and more costly to protect. We urge you to help to restore SWG funding by calling Chairman Burns and Ranking Member Dorgan and expressing your support for the President's recommendation of \$75 million for SWG.

The Alaska Chapter is a scientific and educational organization founded in 1971. We are comprised of nearly 200 wildlife biologists and managers employed by state, federal, and borough resource agencies, academic institutions, non-governmental conservation organizations, and private industry. Our mission is to enhance the ability of wildlife professionals to conserve biological diversity, sustain productivity, and ensure responsible use of wildlife resources in Alaska for the benefit of society.

Alaskan scientists, conservationist groups, and sporting organizations working together to conserve wildlife and vital natural areas for future generations crafted a Wildlife Action Plan to outline the implementation and use of SWG in Alaska. Since the initiation of SWG in 2001, the State of Alaska has received over \$18.3 million to support development and implementation of our Wildlife Action Plan.

The SWG funding was used to develop several new program elements within the Divisions of Sport Fish and Wildlife Conservation in the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). The Nongame Program in the Division of Wildlife Conservation has supported 50 new wildlife projects over the past 3 years – all designed to maintain

species diversity and abundance and avoid designations as threatened or endangered. The ADFG is also building program capacity in education and outreach to complement traditional wildlife programs. Overall, SWG has greatly enhanced the public's understanding of wildlife conservation in Alaska.

Projects undertaken through the Wildlife Action Plan are improving our understanding of natural systems, wildlife, and wildlife habitats. This improved understanding enhances planning and allows for a better evaluation of the effects of management actions on wildlife and wildlife habitat in Alaska. This is beneficial for wildlife and improves our understanding of species ecology, which strengthens science-based recommendations in the environmental permitting of development projects important to Alaska's economy. The SWG Program in Alaska currently funds 10 projects with universities and helps support Governor Murkowski's goal of developing and maintaining research partnerships between state agencies and universities to address resource development while ensuring a healthy environment. A memo on May 23, 2005 (mistakenly dated 2006) from the Commissioners of the Alaska Departments of Fish and Game, Natural Resources, and Environmental Conservation to Mike Nizich, Deputy Chief of Staff to the Governor, provided details on the types of applied research SWG projects can help address, such as the potential effects of climate change on wildlife populations and habitat.

SWG provides funding essential for the success of our Wildlife Action Plan. Unfortunately, the House of Representatives recently passed a spending bill that cut SWG by almost one-third from the President's recommendation of \$75 million, and \$35 million less than 226 members of Congress asked for in an open letter. If the number remains the same in the Senate spending bill, only \$50 million will go to SWG in FY 07. This would be a decrease from \$65 million allocated in FY06 and would result in substantially less money for fish and wildlife conservation in Alaska.

The Alaska Chapter appreciates your past support of wildlife conservation programs, including your participation in the open letter in support of State Wildlife Grants. We urge you to support the President's request of \$75 million for State Wildlife Grants. If you have questions regarding any comments in this letter, please contact me at 907-459-7327 or via electronic mail at tom_paragi@fishgame.state.ak.us.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Paragi, President
Alaska Chapter, The Wildlife Society