

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2020

The Honorable Aurelia Skipwith
Director
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Skipwith:

We write to express deep concern about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) exclusion of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge (the Refuge) Multi-Purpose Building and Public Recreational Facilities construction project in the President's Fiscal Year 2021 Budget. The exclusion of the project is a major disappointment for the Ridgefield community, and all of those throughout the region who were anticipating the completion of the new Community and Nature Center after its construction had been authorized by your agency the prior year.

The USFWS Fiscal Year 2020 budget request included \$6.225 million for the construction phase of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Multi-Purpose Building and Public Recreational Facilities in the line-item construction five-year plan. Given your agency's prior determination that the project met the standards for funding, your abrupt decision to remove the construction project from the five-year plan in the Fiscal Year 2021 budget request leaves the timing of a new center in jeopardy and demands detailed explanation.

The Refuge receives nearly 160,000 visitors each year, many of whom are students visiting for outdoor classroom educational activities. The Refuge factors into economic activity in the region as well; the tens of thousands of visitors provide a real benefit to the restaurants and other retail businesses in the Ridgefield area.

The facilities on site at the Refuge need vital upgrades to replace the small trailer that currently serves as the administrative office and visitor facilities with buildings that properly welcome the visiting public and enhance the visitor experience. While we are appreciative of USFWS efforts to begin work on the Refuge's Multipurpose Building for administrative offices, it is important the Community and Nature Center facility for the thousands of visitors to the Refuge is not unnecessarily delayed.

The residents we serve cherish what this Refuge represents: unique access to the natural beauty and native culture that are part of the identity of this region. We request that you provide us with a detailed explanation behind this funding decision. Additionally, we strongly encourage you to consider the critical importance of this project to the local community, and work with our offices to identify options to restore its funding as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator