



Ecological Society of America
1990 M Street, NW
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Washington, DC 20036

November 27, 2012

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Republican Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
H-232, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Office of the Democratic Leader
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

President Obama and US Congressional Leadership:

On behalf of the 10,000 scientists who comprise the Ecological Society of America, I am writing to request that you support a balanced approach to deficit reduction that prevents the automatic spending cuts (budget sequestration) that would be implemented under the Budget Control Act (P.L. 112-25). Sustained investment in scientific research has historically played an important role in fostering economic growth and job creation through innovation.

According to a report from the American Association of the Advancement of Science, research and development (R&D) funding as a share of the economy is already on the decline: "As a share of the economy federal R&D is 16.7 percent smaller than it was a decade ago, and 29.7 percent smaller than it was in the 1970s." The National Science Foundation allocates 90 percent of research funding through a merit review process as grants or cooperative agreements to individual researchers and groups at colleges, universities, academic consortia, nonprofit institutions, and small businesses. These cuts will result in reductions in grants and contracts and furloughs and layoffs for researchers. According to a report from George Mason University, nearly 31,000 jobs will be lost in the life, physical and social sciences next year if sequestration is implemented.

In addition to stifling critical investments in scientific research and natural resource programs that would weaken our global competitiveness, these cuts would also greatly inhibit our capacity to respond to natural disasters and ensure public safety. As important as it is for our military service men and women to have the resources and capability to protect our nation from human threats, it is likewise important for our nation's research institutions and federal agencies to have the resources to improve our understanding and preparedness to natural threats including emerging

zoonotic diseases such as West Nile virus, changing environmental conditions such as severe drought, and natural disasters such as Hurricane Sandy.

Recent extreme weather events have highlighted how preserving investment in scientific data collection and sustaining our natural resources play a critical role in protecting public health and safety. Federal scientists are among those on the frontlines in helping to assess and mitigate natural threats posed by wildfires, violent storms, hurricanes, tornadoes and floods. For example, an estimated \$88 million cut to the US Geological Survey (USGS) would hamper agency scientists' ability to monitor land and water changes that may pose a threat to public safety caused by extreme weather events. USGS cuts would also impact the agency's Earthquake Hazard's Program, which is critical in assessing the impacts of unforeseen events like the 2011 earthquake, whose epicenter was in Louisa County, VA. Cuts to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's satellite programs could lead to serious gaps in weather collection data. Layoffs for coastal management scientists and practitioners would impede habitat restoration efforts for the nation's coasts and wetlands.

These cuts would also curb federal efforts to manage invasive plant and animal species, which cost the US more than \$120 billion in damages annually, according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). FWS has spent millions of dollars over the past decade to curb the spread of the nutria, a non-native rodent that has destroyed large areas of marshland, causing significant landscape changes and erosion that threaten commercial and recreational fisheries and stymie pollution and storm control efforts. US crop production loses \$13 billion annually from invasive insects.

A report from the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) notes that full implementation of the defense and non-defense discretionary spending cuts would only delay by two years the point at which public debt surpasses 100 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. According to the report, "Our unsustainable fiscal situation is driven by healthcare inflation, the retirement of the baby boomers, and an inefficient tax code that raises too little revenue. Yet the sequester does nothing to address these problems, instead cutting almost exclusively from defense and non-defense discretionary spending, which are already projected to decline substantially as a percentage of the economy over the coming decade."

Implementation of the current spending caps enacted under the Budget Control Act already does much to limit non-defense discretionary spending growth over the next ten years. Further cuts that focus exclusively on these programs, however, stand to restrain the United States' ability to remain competitive in science and innovation and pose serious threats to our ability to steward our natural resources and prepare and respond to natural disasters. It is vital that members of both parties muster the political courage to make the tough choices today, so that our nation can continue to have the necessary resources to invest in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Collins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Scott Collins, President
Ecological Society of America