

20 23

IMPACT REPORT



Dear Friends,

Defenders of Wildlife made incredible progress protecting wildlife and wild places in 2023, helping shape a brighter future for imperiled species and vital landscapes across North America. It was a particularly special year for Defenders as we honored the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the world's most effective conservation law in the fight to save species from extinction. As the leading advocate for the ESA, we worked to highlight its incredible conservation achievements, call attention to the grave danger the ESA is facing right now and galvanize urgently needed support so it can continue to protect vulnerable species for the *next* 50 years and beyond.

Defenders' conservation mission grows more vital each day as we race to save nature under threat from the escalating biodiversity and climate crises. We are determined to build on our record of success and continue leading the movement to preserve, protect and restore imperiled species and healthy ecosystems. Our focus remains steadfast on:

- challenging attacks on wildlife through advocacy, policy and litigation,
- advancing innovative and science-based solutions,
- protecting and strengthening our bedrock environmental laws,
- coordinating on-the-ground species and habitat restoration,
- promoting human-wildlife coexistence,
- investing in impactful collaborations and partnerships
- and building a more diverse and powerful conservation movement.

With your invaluable support, we are making a lasting difference for wildlife and the vulnerable lands and waters they need to survive and thrive. More and more species are counting on us. Together, we will give them a voice and fight tirelessly to protect our planet's rich biodiversity. We are deeply grateful for your partnership and commitment to our critical mission. *Thank you* for making our important work possible.




Jamie Rappaport Clark
President and CEO



Mark Caylor
Board Chair





For more than 75 years, Defenders of Wildlife has been a leading voice for the conservation of North American wildlife dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural habitat. Our team of policy, legal, science and advocacy experts work at every level from the federal government to the fields, forests and water where wildlife live. We work to transform policies and to craft innovative and enduring conservation solutions guided by three conservation imperatives:

PREVENT species and their habitats from becoming imperiled.

PROTECT endangered and threatened species and their habitats.

RESTORE the health of once-vulnerable species and their habitats.

Guided by these goals and thanks to your generous support, we were able to achieve many significant victories in 2023.

WHO WE ARE

DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE made important progress for imperiled species and vital landscapes across the United States in 2023.

WE ARE CONSERVATION SCIENTISTS

CONSERVATION SCIENTISTS published a comprehensive [report](#) exploring the potential impacts of the global biodiversity crisis in the U.S. This groundbreaking work analyzed all five drivers of the global extinction crisis at the national scale and is the first to find that *climate change* endangers the greatest number of our nation's most imperiled species. In honor of the Endangered Species Act's 50th anniversary, we also developed a [report](#) exploring the Act's past successes, current challenges and promising future for the *next* 50 years and beyond.



WE ARE FIELD TEAMS

FIELD TEAMS led numerous efforts to engage communities around the country, building support and inspiring meaningful action for conservation initiatives that affect imperiled species like the [Red Wolf](#), Florida panther, ocelot, gray wolf, Mexican gray wolf, California sea otter, Southern resident orca, [Cook Inlet beluga whale](#) and more.

LEFT TO RIGHT Bison, Yellowstone National Park; Christi Heun gathering field data on the collared pika in Hatcher Pass, Alaska; Dr. Lindsay Rosa Vice President, Conservation Research and Innovation, Center for Conservation Innovation



WE ARE POLICY EXPERTS

POLICY EXPERTS unveiled WALT: Wildlife and Land Trusts, a revolutionary new online tool for land trusts to access federal resources to conserve wildlife. Land trusts steward 61 million acres of land in the U.S., an area larger than all the national parks combined, so they have a unique opportunity to have an incredible impact on wildlife. The first of its kind, this invaluable tool is already helping facilitate greater engagement between land trusts and federal agencies to advance wildlife conservation priorities.

LEFT TO RIGHT Southern resident orca; Gray wolf, Yellowstone National Park; 2023 Lobby Day

WE ARE LOBBYISTS

LOBBYISTS worked diligently to secure critical funding increases in the FY2023 federal spending package for the Bureau of Land Management's Threatened and Endangered Species program, the U.S. Forest Service's Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species Program and the Nonlethal Initiative within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program to reduce human-wildlife conflicts. In fact, our advocacy was instrumental in building an 89% increase for the Nonlethal Initiative since it first received funding in FY2020 and is, in turn, transforming wildlife policy within the agency in support of coexistence.



WE ARE LAWYERS

LAWYERS sprang into action to defend Colorado's gray wolf reintroduction plan and ensure that paws were on the ground by the December 31, 2023 deadline. Just days prior to the planned release of wolves, two livestock industry groups filed a federal lawsuit as a last-ditch attempt to delay the wolf reintroduction. Defenders was the first of several wildlife advocacy organizations to swiftly intervene in the case and provide a robust defense of the wolf reintroduction program. Following a lengthy hearing that included arguments from Defenders' lawyers, the judge denied the petitioners' request for injunctive relief and the state agency was allowed to proceed with the reintroduction. With the help of our talented and fiercely committed legal team, Colorado successfully reintroduced the first 10 wolves to the state in December 2023.





Defenders honored the Endangered Species Act's milestone anniversary by hosting a historic symposium at the U.S. Capitol to celebrate the act's incredible successes, discuss the dangers it is facing and rally the political courage needed to protect and strengthen this indispensable conservation tool. Our president and CEO, Jamie Rappaport Clark, was a keynote speaker and emceed the event, which featured many other notable speakers such as the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Associate Administrator for Fisheries of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Members of Congress, Tribal leaders, scientists and conservation advocates from around the country. This momentous event is one example of the critical role Defenders plays as a leading champion of the Endangered Species Act – because defending the ESA *is* defending wildlife.

PREVENT

species and their habitats
from becoming imperiled



PREVENT

BUILDING FENCES AND SUPPORT FOR BEARS

Our highly effective coexistence program celebrated another successful year providing communities around the country with essential tools and techniques to reduce human-wildlife conflicts and help people peacefully share the landscape with wildlife. For example, we completed the 13th year and surpassed the 650th project of our electric fence incentive program, helping landowners avoid conflicts with grizzly bears and other predators by securing attractants such as livestock, chicken coops, beehives, gardens and garbage. Meanwhile, our Alaska team was busy *further* expanding this popular program to support the conservation and protection of brown bears on the Kenai Peninsula and in southeast Alaska.



PREVENT

OUR UNRELENTING FIGHT TO PROTECT A DELICATE ARCTIC ECOSYSTEM

Following years of relentless advocacy and fueling public outcry, the Biden administration cancelled the existing leases for fossil fuel drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Defenders is focused on pressuring Congress to repeal the Arctic Refuge oil and gas program and permanently protect this iconic landscape and sensitive Arctic wildlife from any possible future drilling.



PREVENT

Thanks to Defenders' collaborative work promoting coexistence and science-based management decisions, there are now more than 250 Mexican gray wolves roaming Arizona and New Mexico – marking the 8th consecutive year of population growth. We supported (for the 4th year) a program with the Mexican Wolf Interagency Field Team that employed 13 wolf technician positions for graduate students, who are trained to assist the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) with wolf monitoring, increasing security around dens, cross-fostering captive-born pups into wild-born litters and implementing conflict reduction strategies. We also contributed to 13 range rider projects in the Southwest designed to reduce wolf-live-stock conflicts and partnered with the Indian Nations Conservation Alliance to support nonlethal coexistence strategies on Tribal lands.

As a result of our lawsuit, the Bureau of Land Management abandoned the so-called “Pinyon-Juniper Categorical Exclusion Rule” adopted during the previous administration. By authorizing extensive destruction of native pinyon pine and juniper habitats across the American West, this rule posed an imminent threat to the survival of the pinyon jay – a gregarious bird whose population has declined by as much as 85% over the past 50 years. In more good news, FWS responded to our 2022 petition to list the pinyon jay under the ESA and determined that listing may be warranted.

Thanks to Defenders' effective advocacy for sustainable water management in California, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation decided to renegotiate a water use contract for the San Joaquin River for the first time since 1968. After years of allowing contractors to overuse

limited water resources with devastating impacts on wildlife, we are hopeful this process will lead to stronger protections for endangered species that depend on this river.

Defenders successfully pushed for increased funding to protect manatees from suffering the impacts of a large-scale loss of seagrass along Florida's Atlantic coast. The funding we helped to secure went toward a second, enhanced feeding program and expanded capacity for rescue, rehabilitation and habitat restoration efforts. In a positive sign, the experimental feeding program was recently discontinued due to the partial recovery of seagrass beds in key foraging sites. However, there is much work ahead to secure a future for this species and Defenders continues to fight for meaningful actions to reduce nutrient pollution and restore vital warm-water habitat.

50

Defenders fought tirelessly to oppose more than 50 devastating congressional proposals introduced to rewrite the ESA, slash funding for conservation and single out some of our most vulnerable species to legislate their extinction.



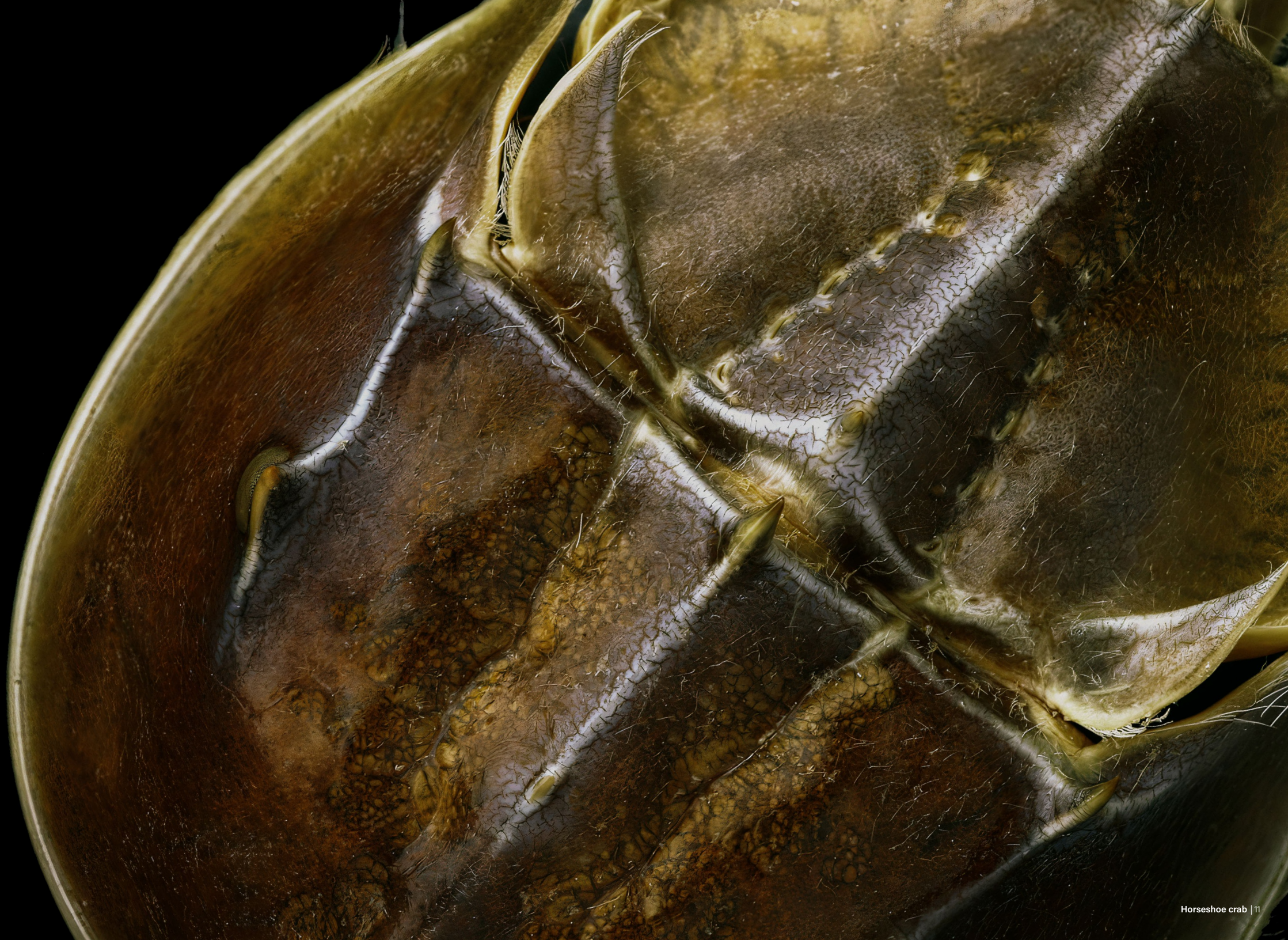
250

There are now more than 250 wild Mexican gray wolves roaming Arizona and New Mexico, marking the 8th consecutive year of population growth for this endangered species.

LEFT TO RIGHT Mexican gray wolf, Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge; Florida manatee; San Joaquin River

PROTECT

endangered and threatened
species and their habitats



PROTECT

HOPE THROUGH PERSEVERANCE

After nearly two decades of legal efforts, Defenders won a huge victory for the North American wolverine with FWS's decision to list the species under the ESA. Like other snow-dependent species, the wolverine is under serious and escalating threats from climate change, which is melting away their habitat. A clear illustration of how climate change is driving the biodiversity crisis, this listing decision also shows how vital a strong ESA is when other measures fail to protect nature.

PROTECT

EXPANDING HABITAT FOR FLORIDA'S SENSITIVE WILDLIFE

Following many years of Defenders' advocacy to preserve Florida's vanishing wild spaces, FWS expanded the National Wildlife Refuge System within the Greater Everglades by creating a new Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area in Southwest Florida. Threatened by rapid population growth and climate change, Southwest Florida is one of the country's most biologically diverse regions, supporting over 100 state and federally listed species, including the world's only breeding population of the endangered Florida panther.

PROTECT

Defenders achieved a landmark victory for horseshoe crabs and the federally listed red knot, a stunning shorebird whose populations have plummeted drastically in recent years. We successfully negotiated a historic agreement to prohibit horseshoe crab harvesting on more than 30 beaches along South Carolina's coast for the next five years. Our advocacy also resulted in the FWS's decision to prohibit horseshoe crab harvesting throughout Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge during the spawning season. For decades, commercial harvesting of horseshoe crabs for the biomedical industry has decimated crab populations, limiting the availability of the crabs' eggs that red knots depend on to fuel their epic migration from South Carolina's beaches to their Arctic breeding grounds.

Thanks to a successful Defenders lawsuit, FWS reclassified the northern long-eared bat from "threatened" to "endangered" under the ESA. Suffering catastrophic declines in the core of their range due to white-nose syndrome and habitat destruction, this bat species now has full protection under the ESA and hope for recovery. Defenders also fought hard to defeat a congressional resolution aimed at blocking this listing decision.

We secured protections for *more* vulnerable species when FWS responded to our petitions and listed the lesser prairie-chicken and cactus ferruginous pygmy owl under the ESA. The agency also issued proposals to list the dunes sagebrush lizard and the California spotted owl, while the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration (NOAA) Fisheries announced a proposed rule to ban the import and export of the threatened Banggai cardinalfish to protect this species from extinction.

Defenders won a critical victory for imperiled wildlife in and around the Gulf of Mexico when a district court ruled that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and federal wildlife agencies must conduct ESA consultations before opening the Bonnet Carré Spillway. This will provide meaningful protections for Gulf sturgeon, West Indian manatee, piping plover, red knot and highly imperiled sea turtles whose habitats have been subjected to a rush of polluted freshwater each time the Spillway is opened.



100+

The new Everglades to Gulf Conservaton Area in Southwest Florida will conserve and connect important habitat for more than 100 state and federally listed species, including the world's only breeding population of the endangered Florida panther.



99

Since 2006, the white-nosed syndrome has wiped out 99% of the northern long-eared bat population. Thanks to a successful Defenders lawsuit, this bat species now has full protection under the ESA and hope for recovery.

LEFT TO RIGHT Dunes sagebrush lizard; Florida panther; Lesser prairie-chicken.

RESTORE

the health of once-vulnerable
species and their habitats



RESTORE

REPAIRING ECOSYSTEMS AND MENDING HISTORY

Defenders made huge progress supporting Tribal initiatives to restore bison to Tribal lands through a “quarantine-to-restoration” program that began in 2019 to save Yellowstone bison from slaughter. Marking the largest transfer of bison under this program, we assisted with relocating 112 Yellowstone bison to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana. Since 2019, we have helped transfer nearly 300 bison from Yellowstone to the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes at Fort Peck and others across the country, restoring the unique Yellowstone bison genes to historic lands they once roamed.



RESTORE

RECOVERING FERRETS AND REPAIRING PRAIRIE ECOSYSTEMS

Defenders is bringing hope for recovery for the endangered black-footed ferret, helping return this keystone species to its home on the prairie grasslands. We assisted with the first release of ferrets on the Southern Plains Land Trust property in Colorado, where Defenders has been working over the past five years to restore habitat and build the prairie dog population. Now supporting over 2,000 acres of active prairie dog colonies, this site is an essential part of recovery efforts for this critically endangered species.



RESTORE

In a monumental conservation achievement, Defenders helped bring the gray wolf back to the Centennial State. Colorado took a huge first step in fulfilling the historic, voter-mandated gray wolf state restoration plan by releasing the first ten wolves to the western part of the state in December 2023. Defenders played a key role in the effort to pass the 2020 ballot measure mandating wolf reintroduction and served on the state's Stakeholder Advisory Group to help shape the reintroduction and management plan. Over the past several years, we have been on-the-ground fostering relationships with local communities and partnering with ranchers to build support for wolf restoration and promote peaceful ways to coexist with wolves on the landscape.

Thanks to Defenders' tenacious advocacy and legal actions, the Red Wolf recovery program is back on track. We successfully negotiated a landmark settlement with FWS that guarantees a brighter future for Red Wolves and a renewed federal commitment to the recovery of this critically endangered species. Since Defenders' court victory compelled FWS to release Red Wolves into the wild, we have excitedly watched the wild population grow over the past two years, with another wild born litter of five and two family groups with litters released in 2023.

In response to Defenders' legal action, the Biden administration announced proposals in June 2023 to reverse some of the harmful rules from the previous administration that weakened the ESA.

While we welcome the positive proposals, we are working tirelessly to ensure all of the harmful rule changes are reversed and the statute is fully restored to protect species from extinction.

Thanks to Defenders' leadership and advocacy, many states are prioritizing wildlife crossing infrastructure to restore habitat connectivity and improve the safety of roadways for wildlife and people. Our collaborative efforts to promote safe passage programs in North Carolina, Florida, New Mexico, Texas and Montana are essential to the conservation of vulnerable species under growing threats from habitat fragmentation, climate change and vehicle collisions.



112
Defenders assisted with relocating 112 Yellowstone bison to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana.

10
Defenders played a key role in the effort to restore gray wolves to Colorado, resulting in the release of the first 10 wolves in December 2023.

LEFT TO RIGHT Gray wolves; Red Wolf pups; Fort Peck bison

FINANCIALS

In 2023, Defenders of Wildlife’s nearly 2.1 million members and supporters contributed more than \$45 million for wildlife and wildlife habitat. This figure includes all those who generously donated their time and expertise. The steadfast support of our donors allows Defenders to sustain our program and public education efforts in the field, the courts and on Capitol Hill.

2023 SOURCES OF FUNDING

Grants and Contributions	26,502
Bequests, Trusts, and Split Interests	9,180
Income from Investments, Annuity Reserve Funds and Trusts	3,484
Royalties and Other Income	621
Contributed Services	5,909
Total Revenue	45,696

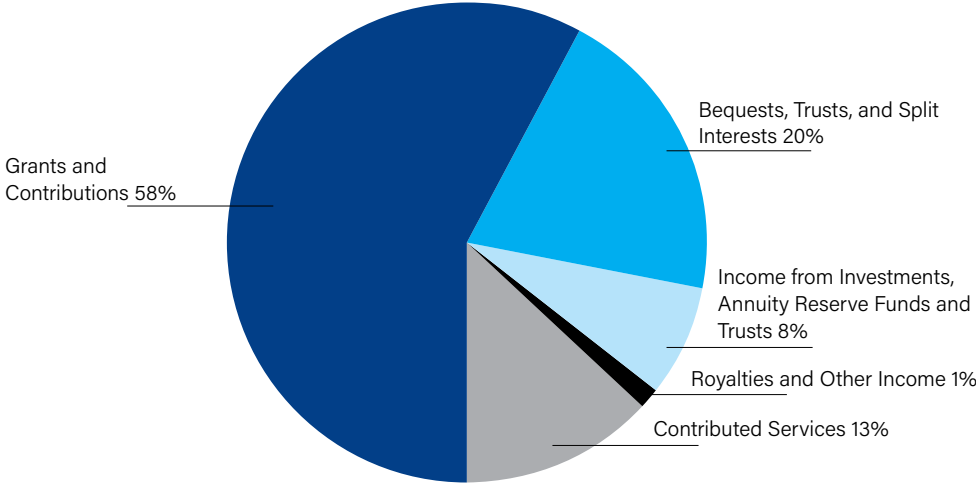
USE OF FUNDS

Biodiversity Conservation	18,360
Constituency Mobilization	17,334
Fundraising	1,111
Management and General	6,532
Total Expenses	43,337

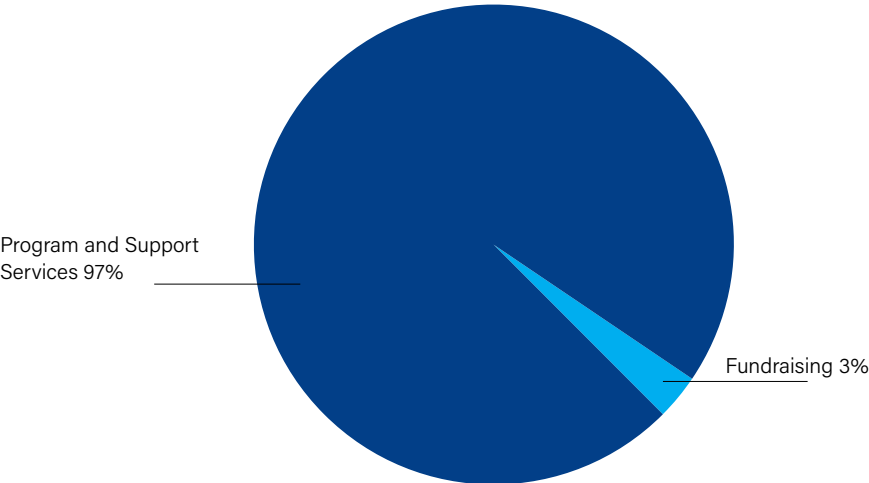
Change in Net Assets	2,359
Net Assets, Start of the Year	43,433
Net Assets, End of the Year	45,792

Dollars are in thousands.

TOTAL REVENUE



USE OF FUNDS



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There are many ways to [support Defenders of Wildlife](#) and protect imperiled wildlife. To learn more or donate, contact us at 1-800-385-9712, or choose one of the following options.

MEMBERSHIP

Become a Wildlife Ambassador member with a single donation of \$1,000 or more and enjoy more personal involvement with Defenders, plus unique benefits.

[Join Defenders' Wildlife Guardians](#), our monthly giving program, and make your donations easily and automatically through a credit card or checking account.

Become a Wildlife Circle member with a donation of \$100 to \$999 and be a key partner in our work to protect wolves and other wildlife.

ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO GIVE

[Transfer appreciated assets](#) directly to Defenders and maximize potential tax benefits.

If you are 70.5 or older, [roll over](#) a portion of your IRA to benefit wildlife. Remember, these gifts must come directly from your IRA account.

Get started on a contribution from your [donor-advised fund](#).

WORKPLACE GIVING

Check with your personnel office or that of your spouse/partner about your company's [Corporate Matching Gifts program](#).

Ask about [EarthShare](#) where you work and designate Defenders of Wildlife (CFC #10624) for all or part of your gift.

WILDLIFE LEGACY SOCIETY

[Include Defenders as a beneficiary](#) in your will, living trust, retirement plan, life insurance policy or other estate plan, and leave a lasting mark on wildlife and the world by helping us continue our conservation work. You can specify that Defenders receives a certain percentage, dollar amount or residuary share of your estate. To include Defenders in your will or other estate plans, provide the following language to your professional advisor: "I bequeath (percentage, residuary share or specific amount or asset) to Defenders of Wildlife (Tax ID: 53-0183181), 1130 17th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036." We can also help you structure life income gifts such as charitable gift annuities or charitable trusts that support wildlife while providing income and tax advantages for you and your loved ones. Call us at 1-800-915-6789, or email legacy@defenders.org.



Defenders of Wildlife is a national nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the protection of all native wild animals and plants in their natural communities.

defenders.org

PHOTO CREDITS

PAGE

- Cover, Red Wolf, istock
- 2 Great egrets, Black skimmer, Tricolored heron and Roseate spoonbill, Al Powell
- 3 Wolves, Ashton Hooker/NPS
- 4 Bison, Barbara Swanson; Christi Heun gathering field data, Christi Heun/Defenders of Wildlife
- 5 Southern resident orca, Katie Jones; Gray wolf, Sam Parks; Conservation Scientist, Defenders of Wildlife
- 6 Grizzly bear, istock
- 7 Pinyon jay, istock
- 8 Brown bear, Jen Kardiak
- 9 Polar bears, Cheryl Strahl Photography
- 10 Mexican gray wolf, USFWS; Florida manatee, Douglas Childs; San Joaquin River, istock
- 11 Horseshoe crab, istock
- 12 Wolverine, Len Rue Enterprises, LLC
- 13 Florida Everglades, istock
- 14 Dunes sagebrush lizard, Ryan Hagerty/USFWS; Florida panther, David Shindle/FWC; Lesser prairie-chicken, Kansas State Research (CC BY 2.0)
- 15 Canada lynx, Lisa Hupp/USFWS
- 16 Bison, Chamois Andersen/Defenders of Wildlife
- 17 Black-footed ferret, USFWS
- 18 Gray wolves, istock; Red Wolf pups, Robert Wilcox; Fort Peck bison, Chamois Anderson
- 20 Bog turtle, Justin Grubb/Running Wild Media
- 21 Monarch butterflies, Mike Budd/USFWS
- 22 Ferruginous pygmy owl, Rolf Nussbaumer Photography
- 23 Northern long-eared bat, Al Hicks/NYDEC (CC BY 2.0)
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- 25 Southern sea otter, Justin Grubb/Running Wild Media
- 26 Ocelot, Larry Ditto
- 27 Bumblebee, Christine Haines
- 28 Florida gopher tortoise, Justin Grubb/Running Wild Media
- 31 Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Running Wild Media