

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 6, 2018

Mr. Gregory Sheehan  
Principal Deputy Director  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1849 C Street NW, Room 3331  
Washington, D.C. 20540-0001

Dear Deputy Director Sheehan:

We write to raise concerns about the increasingly dire situation of the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow, an endangered species endemic to Central Florida's dry prairies, whose population now numbers fewer than one hundred birds according to recent reports. Those reports also suggest that recovery efforts may be hampered by funding decisions made within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). We urge you to ensure that adequate funding for urgent and priority needs for the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow Program are met in 2018, and that funding for any additional needs are duly considered for their potential impact on the Program's ultimate success.

Recovering listed species from manageable extinction risks is among USFWS's most important roles. Floridians have witnessed some important successes in increasing the populations of treasured, but threatened, wildlife including the Florida Panther, Florida Manatee, and American Crocodile, among others. In this case, USFWS, the State of Florida, local governments, private landholders and ranchers, and conservation groups have already made significant investments to protect critical habitat where Florida Grasshopper Sparrows should be able to thrive for decades to come. However, USFWS efforts this year to ramp up captive breeding operations, control nest predation by invasive fire ants, and manage disease will be critical to ensuring a stable breeding population that will sustain future reintroduction efforts.

Without a robust Florida Grasshopper Sparrow Program, the species could become the first North American bird to go extinct since 1986 when the last known Dusky Seaside Sparrow perished in Florida. While we understand that all agencies face painful budget decisions, the funding needs in question make up less than one percent of the total Recovery Program funding for USFWS proposed by the Senate Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee for the current fiscal year. Furthermore, the insights gained from the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow Program can also be applied to increase the success and cost-effectiveness of conservation efforts for other listed birds like the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow in Florida's Everglades.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator



Bill Nelson  
U.S. Senator