

May 13, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol H-307
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: FY2025 Funding Request for the U.S. Forest Service International Program and Monarch Butterfly Conservation

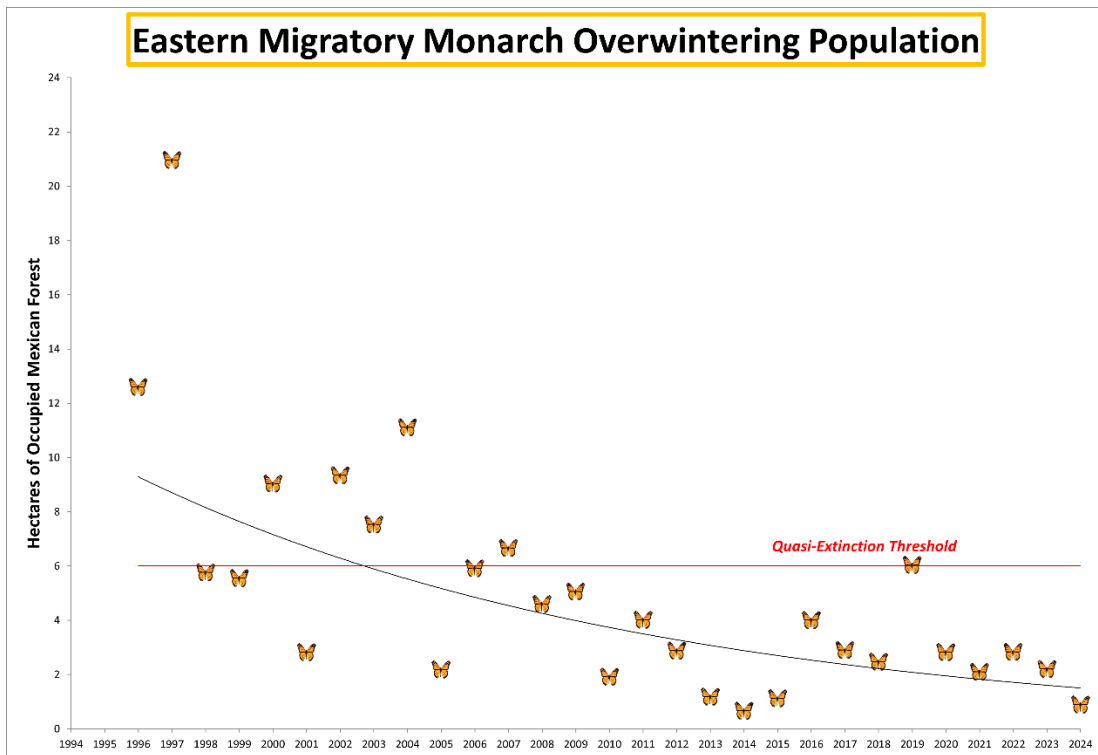
Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro,

Once one of the most common and beloved butterflies in the United States, the monarch butterfly is now the face of the wildlife extinction crisis. In addition to landscape-scale threats from pesticides, development, and habitat loss in the U.S., the loss of overwintering habitat in Mexico is an existential threat to the monarchs' future. The oyamel fir stands where the eastern population of monarchs roost are threatened by illegal logging, land conversion for farming, and climate change. Despite ongoing efforts in the U.S. and Mexico to save the monarch butterfly, the situation is now dire and urgent help is desperately needed. Thus, we request that Congress increase funding for the U.S. Forest Service's International Program to \$30 million per year starting in Fiscal Year 2025. This level of funding would allow the agency to ramp up its international efforts in Mexico to combat illegal logging and provide additional capacity to local communities to sustainably manage the monarchs' overwintering habitat.

Monarch butterflies are ambassadors of nature and symbols of summertime outdoors. Generations of schoolchildren have reared monarchs in classrooms, watching in wonder as striped caterpillars transform into large orange-and-black adult butterflies. The monarch's multigenerational migration is legendary — a journey of more than 2,000 miles from Mexico to Canada, undertaken by animals weighing less than a single gram. Sadly, the monarchs' epic migration is now at risk of total collapse. In the past two decades, monarch populations have plummeted by 90%, dramatically increasing the likelihood of extinction. The latest annual count for eastern monarchs was the second lowest ever recorded. The population declined by nearly 60% from the previous year and the population is only 1/6 the size needed to be out of the danger zone of migratory collapse.

Climate change and habitat loss, both in the U.S. and Mexico, are two of the primary drivers of the butterfly's decline. The climate crisis is undermining the stable weather conditions and predictable flowering seasons that monarchs need to complete their migration. Climate change also threatens

the oyamel fir forests in Mexico, where monarchs take shelter for the winter. Oyamel firs, commonly called the “sacred fir,” grow only at high altitudes and require cool, moist conditions to survive. The oyamel fir ecosystem is one of Mexico’s most endangered forest-types; only 2% of the original forest remains. These trees serve as both a blanket and umbrella during the winter, protecting monarchs from extreme cold temperatures and precipitation. As the climate crisis worsens, however, oyamel forests are suffering from progressively hotter, drier temperatures and are now subject to forest fires year-round. It is now expected that the International Monarch Biosphere Reserve in Mexico will become climatically unsuitable for monarchs by the end of the century. The situation has become so dire that efforts are underway to move the trees higher up the mountainside to a more suitable climate, but the strategy is experimental, success is highly uncertain, and the forests are already near the tops of the mountains.



Further, while many government policies in Mexico promote sustainable forest management and ban most logging in areas where monarchs overwinter, illegal logging still accounts for much of the forest loss in the Biosphere Reserve. Up until 2020 there had been a significant reduction in illegal logging thanks to the commitment of the communal farmland associations, or “ejidos,” and the indigenous communities, surveillance efforts, and payment for ecosystem services. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, led to the loss of revenue and an increase in illegal logging. Deforestation is still occurring in the reserve and in the surrounding buffer zone areas. For example, the increased demand for avocados has spurred growers to clear land to make room for avocado orchards, cutting down thousands of acres of oak and pine trees that form a vital buffer around the oyamel fir forests. As of 2018, nearly 2,400 acres of the Reserve have been converted into avocado plantations, representing 2% of the Reserve’s land base.

Monarch butterflies once numbered in the billions and covered 10 hectares of overwintering forest. Today, they occupy *less than one* hectare. Dedicating an additional \$10 million to the Forest Service's International Program can help bolster efforts to promote sustainable forestry practices, forest conservation and reforestation, and support the local communities committed to preserving the butterflies' unique habitat. Now more than ever, we need Congress to step up to the challenge and help save one of the world's most iconic butterflies from further decline.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
Animal Welfare Institute
Christian Council of Delmarva
DC Natives
Down to Earth Apiaries
Earth Path Sanctuary
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental Protection Information Center- EPIC
Friends of the Earth
Howling For Wolves
Los Padres ForestWatch
New Hampshire Audubon
Northern California Council, Fly Fishers International
NYC Plover Project
Oceanic Preservation Society
Resource Renewal Institute
The Urban Wildlands Group
Voices of Wildlife in NH
Zoo New England: Franklin Park Zoo & Stone Zoo