Society for Conservation Biology

Society for Ecological Restoration

American Fisheries Society

The Wildlife Society

American Meteorological Society

Ecological Society of America

February 8, 2013

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: Request for national summit on climate change

Dear Mr. President:

In your compelling inaugural address you called for this nation to address the threat of climate change. We would like to offer the support and assistance of the thousands of scientists and other professionals who are members of our organizations. As science-based organizations, we respectfully request that you convene a national summit on this urgent and important challenge. The summit would be designed to identify policies and actions that can be taken by each Federal agency and by state and local governments to address the causes and effects of climate change. A considerable number of organizations have now called for a climate change summit and the recent draft report of the National Climate Assessment underscores the need for high-level attention to this issue. Such a national summit on climate change should be informed by science and could bring your Administration together with leaders in the fields of climate research and modeling, mitigation, adaptation, and ecosystem restoration and resilience.

With the significant increases in damage due to climate-driven weather extremes, ranging from more intense storms like Superstorm Sandy, more intense and frequent wildfires, severe flooding, and prolonged droughts, people are becoming increasingly aware that something is wrong and that the Federal government needs to take action. For example, the costs of the recent Midwest drought and Superstorm Sandy may exceed $100 billion.[1] By taking bold and creative

[1] Reinsurance Company Aon Benfield reported that the Midwest drought and Superstorm Sandy together accounted for roughly $100 billion in losses, see http://thoughtleadership.aonbenfield.com/Documents/20130124_if_annual_global_climate_catastrophe_report.pdf; The overall cost of weather extremes may negatively affect annual GDP by three percent or more. See Lazo, J.K., et. al. 2011. *U.S. Economic Sensitivity to Weather Variability*. Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, June 2011.

steps to address climate change, you have a unique opportunity to make climate change solutions a signature part of your legacy. Since technological innovation alone will not be sufficient to fully address climate change, it is important to harness the ability of the natural world to regulate our climate and provide essential services such as filtering air and water. We offer the following ideas that could become topics at a national climate change summit, to advance specific actions to address these challenges:

- *Bolster emergency response to climate disasters* – The nation's emergency response agencies are poorly prepared for an increase in storm frequency and intensity, sea level rise, and other climate-related disasters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, in particular, would benefit from the improved risk assessments and disaster planning that the increased involvement of science-based non-government organizations could bring.

- *Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from land-use activities* – Improving land management practices and pursuing ecological restoration are among the easiest, safest and most enduring strategies to address climate change. For example, the Department of Agriculture could help reduce emissions from farms and forests on Federal, State and private lands through better management by providing guidance to foresters and farmers on climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Council on Environmental Quality could also spur action by issuing guidelines or regulations on the assessment of land-use activities related to greenhouse gas emissions.

- *Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and black soot* – The Environmental Protection Agency has not yet fully utilized its authority to regulate all of the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. As you noted shortly after your reelection, there are numerous practical solutions that can address these pollutants that will boost the economy, create jobs, protect public health and curtail global warming. As the Administration works with Congress to revise the tax code there will be many opportunities to reduce subsidies that encourage emissions and to tax greenhouse gas emissions, thereby generating revenue to support and ease the economic transition toward a sustainable economy.

- *Coordinate climate adaptation responses* – A great deal of adaptation planning is taking place across Federal, State and local jurisdictions; however, there is little coordination and a lack of discussion on what is working and what is not. More work is needed to improve our ability to forecast the impacts of climate change and to adapt to its impacts in a coordinated manner – for example, to link extreme events with climate change through more precise modeling at more targeted, smaller scales and to improve our ability to prepare for climate-driven natural disasters.

- *Protect carbon stores and climate refugia* – Ecosystems can store massive amounts of carbon if we manage these systems wisely. Public lands, such as the National Forests of the Pacific Northwest and Southeast Alaska, can function as significant repositories for sequestering carbon if managed properly, as they already represent some of the most carbon dense forests in the world. Well-managed forests and grasslands also provide irreplaceable refugia for sensitive wildlife and are the source of clean drinking water for millions of Americans.

- *Maintain benefits from high priority conservation lands* – The nation's iconic National Parks, National Monuments, Wilderness areas, National Wildlife Refuges, and other priority lands (such as those highlighted in the America's Great Outdoors Initiative) may not provide lasting economic or ecosystem benefits under a changing climate without taking special precautions. Expanded protected areas and compatible management strategies in the lands surroundings these areas are urgently needed to ensure that society will continue to realize the myriad ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, from these lands.

- *Balance alternative energy sources* – Renewable energy can help reduce our dependence on foreign oil and reduce greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Large-scale deployment of some forms of renewable energy generation, however, can have adverse affects on biodiversity if not carefully planned and located. Our organizations are well suited to helping your administration deploy renewable energy in the most environmentally responsible manner.

The steps outlined above will also provide a basis for stronger international steps to advance the initiatives you have already begun and bolster our engagement with the international community in the clean production of goods and services. Throughout this process we stand ready to act as climate ambassadors to build supportive partnerships with science-based groups around the world. We look forward to the opportunity to help you further define the goals, objectives, and topics for this important summit.

Sincerely,

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