



United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

July 26, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Thomas J. Vilsack, Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Vilsack:

Today we write to request records related to our ongoing oversight investigation into the COVID-19 pandemic origins. A New York-based non-profit organization, EcoHealth Alliance (EcoHealth), used research grant awards from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to sponsor bat coronavirus pathogen collection and risky research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in China for several years preceding the pandemic outbreak. As part of our oversight investigation, we are collecting all relevant U.S. agency records involving EcoHealth. We have identified records of interest in U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agreements involving EcoHealth.

USDA Research Project Collaborations with EcoHealth

EcoHealth describes a historical collaboration on its website with the USDA's National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) in which EcoHealth and USDA would work through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to prevent and control diseases that affected humans and animals.¹ The MOU encouraged joint surveillance, applied research, education and outreach activities to track and understand emerging wildlife diseases and develop effective methods of notification for disease outbreaks and spread in local communities.² Additionally, USDA previously awarded two research grants to EcoHealth (formerly known as Wildlife Trust) to detect the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in Mexico.³ Any of the records for these historical research projects may contain information relevant to the COVID-19 outbreak.

¹ EcoHealth Alliance and the USDA's National Wildlife Research Center Joining Forces to Fight Emerging Infectious Diseases (Apr. 19, 2013) available at <https://www.ecohealthalliance.org/2013/08/ecohealth-alliance-and-the-usdas-national-wildlife-research-center-joining-forces-to-fight-emerging-infectious-diseases>.

² *Id.*

³ USASpending.gov, Award ID numbers: 09-7100-0206-CA and 08-7100-0206-CA (Apr. 27, 2023) available at <https://www.usaspending.gov/search/?hash=cc647992194fad9c116626510ff92709>.

USDA's Alliance with the Global Virome Project

Other records of interest likely in USDA's custody related to an ongoing research partnership with former members of EcoHealth's 10-year research project, known as PREDICT.⁴ PREDICT was sponsored by USAID to establish an early warning pandemic system in Asia and Africa from 2009 through 2019. Led by Dennis Carroll, the former USAID Emerging Threats Division Director, USAID awarded more than \$210 million to Jonna Mazet at the University of California at Davis (UC Davis) for the PREDICT project, which issued then subawards to Peter Daszak at EcoHealth and other collaborators.⁵ The trio of Dennis Carroll, Jonna Mazet and Peter Daszak used **over \$1.3 million of the PREDICT grant** [emphasis added] during PREDICT's final years to travel globally and solicit financial and advocacy support for the Global Virome Project (GVP), a private organization under their control they created to continue the PREDICT research.^{6,7} As a result of their GVP promotional tours, the Chinese and Thai governments promised financial support to the GVP.⁸ The director of China's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2019 explained that the GVP would "start in China and Thailand with field work to collect samples from wild animals and analyze the viruses detected."⁹

The GVP is an institutional member of the Earth Biogenome Project (EBP), a biology moonshot initiative to sequence, catalog and characterize the genomes of all of Earth's plant and animal species.¹⁰ The USDA participates in the EBP and as such, may possess relevant research records or contract agreements with the GVP or with its founders, Peter Daszak, Jonna Mazet, EcoHealth, or UC Davis that could give insight into the GVP's research in China before the COVID-19 outbreak.¹¹

Potential Conflicts of Interest with USDA Employees

Lastly, EcoHealth publishes its own scientific journal and we are concerned about potential conflicts of interest involving two USDA employees who currently represent USDA on EcoHealth's research journal's editorial board.¹² Both Amy T. Gilbert and Kim Pepin of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) are review editors for EcoHealth's journal.¹³ Their participation on EcoHealth's editorial board may be in violation of executive branch employee code of ethics by either giving the appearance that USDA supports EcoHealth, a private organization, or that USDA employees receive gratuities from EcoHealth, a U.S. federal grant recipient.¹⁴

⁴ USAID PREDICT project (Apr. 27, 2023) available at <https://p2.predict.global/>.

⁵ Kat Kerlin, *UC Davis awarded \$100 million to lead program to predict and prevent pandemic threats*, UC DAVIS (Nov. 21, 2014) available at <https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/uc-davis-awarded-100-million-lead-program-predict-and-prevent-pandemic-threats>.

⁶ USAID PREDICT grant records are on file with Senate investigative staff.

⁷ Global Virome Project, *Bellagio Initiative on the Global Virome Project* (2016) available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/581a4a856b8f5bc98311fb03/t/582120e4ff7c5080cc611fd6/1478566120350/GVP+Bellagio+Initiative.pdf>.

⁸ Jim Robbins, *Before the Next Pandemic, an Ambitious Push to Catalog Viruses in Wildlife*, YALE ENVIRONMENT 360 (Apr. 22, 2020) available at <https://e360.yale.edu/features/before-the-next-pandemic-an-ambitious-push-to-catalog-viruses-in-wildlife>.

⁹ Olga Jonas Richard Seifman, *Do we need a Global Virome Project?*, THE LANCET GLOBAL HEALTH (Oct. 1, 2019) available at [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(19\)30335-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(19)30335-3/fulltext).

¹⁰ Victoria Hatch, *The Earth Biogenome Project: on track and ready to ramp up*, EMBL-EBI (Jan 21, 2022) available at <https://www.ebi.ac.uk/about/news/announcements/the-earth-biogenome-project-on-track-and-ready-to-ramp-up/>.

¹¹ Global Virome Project, *Leadership* (May 1, 2023) available at <https://www.globalviromeproject.org/leadership-team>.

¹² EcoHealth, *Editors*, OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF ECOHEALTH ALLIANCE, (Apr. 27, 2023) available at <https://www.springer.com/journal/10393/editors>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ 5 CFR Part 2635, Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch available at <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-5/chapter-XVI/subchapter-B/part-2635/subpart-A>.

Request for Information

1. Please provide the Memorandum of Understanding between USDA-NWRC's and EcoHealth Alliance.
2. Please provide all grant records related to USDA's award to EcoHealth Alliance, formerly known as Wildlife Trust, for USDA award numbers 09-7100-0206-CA and 08-7100-0206-CA.
3. Please provide any records in USDA's custody for research involving the Global Virome Project, UC Davis, Jonna Mazet, Peter Daszak, or EcoHealth Alliance.
4. Please provide the approvals from USDA's ethics official that authorize Amy T. Gilbert and Kim Pepin to participate on the EcoHealth journal editorial board as executive branch employees representing USDA.

To assist our ongoing oversight investigation, please provide the following to Senator Marshall's Chief Investigator at Diane_Cutler@marshall.senate.gov by August 9, 2023. Thank you for your timely consideration of our request.

Very respectfully,



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator