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**TESTIMONY  
FOR THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,  
ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the newly organized Friends of Camas Wildlife National Refuge Group, the many hundreds of BYU-Idaho students that I have taken to Camas National Wildlife Refuge over the years, and on behalf of citizens who love Camas NWR, the National Wildlife Refuge Association and over 230 similar Friends Groups associated with National Wildlife Refuges across the nation, I thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for the chance to participate in the process of democracy in our Great Nation.

It has not escaped my attention that we are, at this moment in time entangled in a nasty, partisan and what seems to me to be an avoidable budget kerfuffle. So today, on behalf of all American citizens everywhere I appeal to the better nature of each of you and ask you each, regardless of your party affiliation, to make the compromises necessary to move the budget of our country forward.

Each National Refuge was specifically set aside by Congress or the President as a treasure and a “refuge” for wildlife. The Camas NWR was protected because it is a critical way-stop for migrating birds. It literally is a refuge and an oasis in a sea of what was formerly sagebrush and today is primarily farmland. Birds traveling between the New World Tropics in the south and Alaska and the North West Territories of Canada in the north depend on Camas as a life or death refueling station.

Waterfowl and shorebirds stop to eat invertebrates and plant materials from the marshes, wetlands and mudflats. Songbirds stop for as few as one to three days to refuel on insects. Data from a banding station at Camas, which was discontinued due to budget cuts several years ago, (the budget cuts before these budget cuts) indicate that small songbirds such as Wilson’s warblers arrive from the south weighing as little as 6.5 grams and leave after one, two, or three days weighing 7.5 plus grams. That is a total body weight increase of about 15%.

In preparation for the yearly migration, the birds have gone through truly amazing phenotypical changes, and are operating on the thinnest of possible energetic budgets.

Depending on weather conditions and winds, some of these birds have been flying non-stop for hundreds of miles and for longer than 24 hours. Without the refueling station at Camas National Wildlife Refuge, most of these birds would not have the energy to continue their flight. They are physically spent when they arrive at Camas and could not continue on to nesting areas in Alaska and northern Canada, or even to successfully nest once they got there, without the refueling stop in Camas. Without a dependable feeding/resting station or stations, the birds simply could not make this yearly migration.

The numbers of warblers that move through the Camas banding station stunned experienced ornithologists. No one knows how many Wilson's warblers execute this migration, but a huge number of them funnel through Camas National Refuge. This is likely because of its geographical location and the loss of so much other habitat to development.

Funding for the banding station at Camas was cobbled together. A passionate and essentially itinerant Ph. D camped out there and used BYU-Idaho and other students, most of whom were not paid, to complete the work. Without advertising, word spread and the local farming/ranching schoolchildren, little old ladies in tennis shoes, scout groups, the RV retirement crowd and locals of all ilk's started to show up to watch and to help. They checked capture nets, recorded data, and banded birds, and as a reward, were occasionally allowed to release the banded birds into the air.

Dr. Jay Carlisle, who ran the banding station, told me that the scientific data was incredibly valuable but that the education value of the birding station dwarfed the value of the scientific data. I have a picture in my lab of a two very small girls, probably 1<sup>st</sup> Grade age, wide-eyed peering at the warbler that one of the tiny girls is about to release. Jay is kneeling down as he prepares to help her release the bird. It is an iconic image that stops people in their tracks; it is as much Americana as any Norman Rockwell calendar. That image is no longer possible. It has been lost to relentless budget cuts.

Since that banding station was cobbled together with volunteer efforts, the National Wildlife Refuge System Budget has been cut every year.

Here is a look at the budget for the Refuge system since FY 2010.

FY 2010	503 M
FY 2011	492 M
FY 2012	485.7M
FY 2013	453.7M

I talked to Brian Wehausen, who is the Refuge Manager at Camas National Wildlife Refuge and asked him what kinds of things he doesn't do because of the yearly budget cuts. He said that:

- They don't have seasonal workers to collect data, maintain the facilities, spray weeds, clean the parking lot and outhouse and just do regular "seasonal jobs"

- He isn't able to provide herbicide to the local weed management group of which Camas NWR and most local land owners are members
- Of course the banding station work is out of the question
- Maintenance and upgrade of equipment and facilities has fallen well behind schedule
- Maintenance or upgrade of interpretation materials for public education aren't regularly completed (I personally paid for the last printing of Refuge Maps for distribution to the public from the welcome station in the parking lot)
- Pumping water from deep wells to make up for water loss due to surrounding deep wells, to maintain the wetlands is too expensive

Similar scenarios are repeated on refuges across the nation, where managers are forced to decide "which child to save," so to speak.

Let me give you an example of what the ramifications are because of the lack of funding to one of the categories just listed, noxious weeds.

Noxious weeds are generally aggressive colonizers and move into disturbed or untreated areas. They reduce the productivity of native plants that provide habitat for the insects that songbirds depend upon for migration-fueling energy. They cut production of agricultural crops as well. The prevention and treatment of noxious weeds unites adjacent landowners into weed districts where everyone is expected to participate in the effort to control them. The failure to do so can lead to significant loss to agriculture crops on private land and to wildlife habitat on the refuge. In some cases, the loss of native habitat to invasive plants can be incredibly expensive, or even impossible to reverse.

If the National Wildlife Refuge allows noxious weeds to invade and colonize the refuge, then the Refuge is seen by adjacent landowners and farmers as "bad neighbors" whose lands provide a seed source for the weeds that blow onto adjoining farms.

Before I became a professor, I worked for twelve years as a wildlife biologist for the U.S. Forest Service. There I administered budgets for local Forest Service Units. Budget cuts are damaging everywhere, but Wildlife Refuges do not have the luxury to spread the misery between various projects over a large landscape like the Forest Service and BLM can. Wildlife Refuges are generally smaller units with a single focus and budget. If they go unfunded, the ramifications are local and intense.

We shouldn't just kick the can down the road. What we are now doing is more like kicking the time bomb down the road. It really isn't fair to future generations.

I respectfully ask you to return funding for National Wildlife Refuges to FY 2010 levels.

Thank you,  
Dave Stricklan