

**Written Statement of Alan Rowsome
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before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Regarding the FY 2014 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill
April 16, 2013**

The Wilderness Society (TWS) represents more than 500,000 members and supporters who share our mission to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places. We thank the subcommittee for the opportunity to submit comments on the Fiscal Year 2014 Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

We understand that tough budgetary decisions will need to be made in this fiscal year, however, when deciding on funding that affects hundreds of millions of Americans, we must take into account the full economic, social, environmental and cultural value of the many programs managed by this subcommittee. The economic impacts of Outdoor Recreation, Natural Resource Conservation and Historic Preservation activities in the United States annually generate at least **\$1.7 trillion in economic activity, returning \$211 billion to Federal, State and local governments through tax revenue, and supporting 12.8 million jobs annually** according to a new study released just last week by Rob Southwick and Associates.

To invest in these critical programs that provide jobs, and protect the health and economic well being of local communities, we urge bold, immediate action in support of conservation funding for Fiscal Year 2014. Specifically, TWS recommends:

Land and Water Conservation Fund

LWCF remains the premier federal program to conserve our nation's land, water, historic, and recreation heritage. It is a critical tool to acquire inholdings, expand public lands, and protect national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, wild and scenic river corridors, national scenic and historic trails, the Bureau of Land Management lands, and other federal areas. The companion LWCF state grants program provides crucial support for state and local park acquisitions, recreational facilities, and trail corridors. LWCF also funds two other important state grant programs – the Forest Legacy Program and Cooperative Endangered Species programs – that ensure permanent conservation of important forest lands and threatened and endangered species' habitat.

- *TWS supports funding LWCF at the proposed \$600 million, a level which will support the program in continuing to assist land management agencies manage the public lands more efficiently and cost-effectively. This is achieved through strategic inholdings acquisition which reduces internal boundary line surveying, as well as right-of-way conflicts and special use permits. In addition, LWCF investments in important wildlife and recreational habitat ensure that public lands stay public for hunters, anglers, and other outdoor recreationists for generations to come.*

Department of Interior Wilderness Management

The 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act is in 2014, providing an important opportunity to highlight the value those lands play in protecting ecosystems, wildlife, and primitive outdoor recreation opportunities across the country. We recommend that the agency wilderness management accounts be increased to provide trails maintenance, update signage, remove fencing, and fight invasive species, among other critical wilderness preservation system needs. Specifically:

- **BLM Wilderness**
 - The budget proposal of \$18.687 million for wilderness management in the BLM is a strong proposal, but is still 6% lower than the FY '11 enacted level, the funding level necessary to ensure resource and visitor safety in the 221 BLM wilderness areas.
- **Fish & Wildlife Service Wilderness**
 - Adequately fund the Carhart Training Center, the Leopold Research Institute, and wilderness character baseline assessments using Wilderness Fellows.
 - On the ground, additional funds would be used to remove more fencing and other nonconforming structures; control invasive species; restore degraded hydrology; monitor effects of climate change.
- **National Park Service Wilderness**
 - Provide a funding increase for the base wilderness program from its current level of \$450,000 as well as two years of total funding at \$520,000 to highlight and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. Additional funding would eliminate the backlog of Wilderness Stewardship Plans, support training for all wilderness park superintendents, improve coordination with interagency Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, and provide field-based leadership to reduce the likelihood of litigation due to management inconsistencies.

BLM Onshore Oil and Gas Policy

The BLM is implementing important management reforms of its oil and gas program that is leading toward a better balance between oil and gas development on public lands and the protection of the numerous natural resource values that were put at risk by previous policies. In prior years the Administration has proposed these reforms of the BLM's oil and gas program, which TWS supports:

- *A fee on onshore federal operators designed to bring in \$10 million per year for the I & E program*
- *Continuation of the \$6,500 APD fee first approved by Congress for FY 10*
- *A \$4.00 per acre fee on non-producing onshore leases*
- *Repeal of Sec. 365 of EPACT which diverted lease rental revenues to fund the "Permit Streamlining Pilot Offices", and prohibited the BLM from charging APD fees*

Sage Grouse Initiative

The Wilderness Society supports continued funding of the BLM's National Greater Sage Grouse Planning Strategy, which, if successful, will lead to recovery of this important western game species without the necessity of a listing under the Endangered Species Act.

BLM's National Landscape Conservation System

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) National Landscape Conservation System (Conservation Lands) comprises some 27 million acres of congressionally and presidentially designated lands and waters, including National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness, National Scenic and Historic Trails, and Wild and Scenic Rivers. Stewardship of the Conservation Lands' many units provides jobs for thousands of Americans while supporting vibrant and sustainable economies in surrounding communities. The Conservation Lands provide immeasurable public values from modest investments: outstanding recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, clean water, wilderness, and open space near cities. We ask Congress to:

- *Support the Administration's FY 2014 proposal of \$70.9 million to ensure the natural, cultural, and historical resource protection provided by the Conservation Lands for the American public.*

- *Restore the Challenge Cost Share Program at full funding of \$19 million. This is a cross-cutting program within DOI, which provides a 1:1 match for volunteer activities.*

Renewable Energy

TWS is a strong proponent of transitioning our country to a sustainable energy economy by developing our renewable energy resources quickly and responsibly. We believe renewable energy is an appropriate use of the public lands when sited in areas screened for habitat, resource, and cultural conflicts.

Identifying and avoiding conflicts early in the process is essential in fiscally-constrained times. With the resources requested in the FY 2014 budget, TWS hopes the Department will continue to work to establish a program that ensures the public lands can play an important role in supporting renewable energy infrastructure through expedient environmental review, suitability screening, and energy zone identification to find suitable places for needed renewable energy projects. TWS urges Congress to:

- *Support level or increased for renewable energy programs across Interior from FY 13 enacted.*
- *Support the Department's request to fund BLM's renewable energy activity at no less than \$24 million to make up for the impact of the sequester.*
- *Support level or increased funding for the Fish and Wildlife Service to review and permit renewable energy projects on public and private lands.*

Offshore Oil & Gas Reform

Without an adequate legislative and regulatory framework, effective enforcement, and public transparency, the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the Bureau of Safety and Environment Enforcement (BSEE) cannot effectively oversee offshore oil and gas operations and prevent major releases. Following the BP Gulf tragedy in April 2010, the National Commission on the BP *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, the BOEMRE/U.S. Coast Guard Joint Investigation Team, and the National Academy of Engineering/National Research Council issued comprehensive reports with numerous recommendations for improvements in oversight. Additionally, in early 2013 the federal advisory committee created after the BP tragedy issued recommendations to Interior, including an important recommendation that BSEE develop Arctic-specific standards for Arctic Ocean oil and gas operations.

- *The Department of Interior needs sufficient funding on the order of a 20% increase for BSEE/BOEM to ensure that these valuable recommendations are implemented before another major offshore oil incident occurs.*

National Wildlife Refuge System Funding

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's finest network of protected lands and waters. Designed to conserve our fish and wildlife resources, refuges are located in every state and territory and provide enormous economic benefit for their local communities. Every year, the System attracts 45 million tourists, hunters, fishermen, and other recreationists, generating \$1.7 billion in sales, sustaining nearly 27,000 jobs annually, and contributing over \$185 million in tax revenue. The Refuge System has been under increasing fiscal strain, however, with a maintenance backlog of over \$3 billion.

- *We urge Congress to support the Refuge System at the President's recommendation of \$499 million.*

National Forest Restoration

TWS appreciates recent efforts to shift forest management priorities towards restoration. Programs like Legacy Roads and Trails and Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration are key to ensuring restoration efforts are successful and Congress should continue to prioritize funding for these programs. For the past five years, the Legacy Roads program has provided an essential source of funding to simultaneously restore healthy watersheds and improve recreational access in the national

forests by focusing on roads and trails where lack of maintenance threatens water quality and aquatic species. The success and broad bipartisan support for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration program speaks for itself. We also look forward to the results of the 3-region test pilot for Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR). However, we do not recommend that the IRR pilot program be expanded until the test regions have had several years to prove that IRR can create improved restoration outcomes without a loss of program transparency and accountability. To achieve forest restoration goals in FY 13, TWS recommends that Congress:

- *Fully fund the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program at \$40 million;*
- *Keep Legacy Roads and Trails funding consistent by providing \$45 million.*
- *Continue the IRR as a 3-region pilot program, and work closely with the Forest Service and stakeholders to ensure transparency and accountability for the activities and outcomes of the pilot program.*

Forest Service Planning, Inventory, and Monitoring

The Forest Service Inventory and Monitoring program funds the collection of targeted information that forms the basis for the revision of outdated forest plans. The program also funds forest plan monitoring activities to ensure that plans are meeting goals and to facilitate adaptive management and course corrections if necessary. TWS recommends:

- *Providing adequate and consistent funding to avoid a freeze in forest plan revisions, fewer restored watersheds, less resilient forests, and more risks to water quality and quantity, wildlife, and recreation.*

National Forest Wilderness and Recreation

America's National Wilderness Preservation System is an international model for land conservation. Yet our wilderness areas are suffering from a lack of funding. Trail maintenance, law enforcement, monitoring, and user education are all significantly underfunded, leading to an erosion of wilderness values and a diminution of the experience for wilderness visitors. Without adequate resources, our wilderness areas and the recreation opportunities they provide will continue to suffer. In order to stretch limited dollars in the face of growing needs, the Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness program has grown increasingly reliant on partnerships to accomplish work. While beneficial in terms of leveraging funds and community outreach, this has the side effect of making the program particularly vulnerable to budget cuts.

- *We urge Congress to support wilderness and recreation by restoring funding to the FY12 level of \$281.2 million for the Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness Program.*

National Forest Trails

There are 155,600 miles of trails in the National Forest System. These trails provide 50 million visitor days of cross-country skiing, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, and off-road vehicle use each year. The number of annual visitor days has grown 376% since 1977, and the total mileage of trails has grown 56.9% to accommodate this use. Unfortunately, the trails maintenance and reconstruction budget line item has remained essentially flat since 1980, after adjusting for inflation. In FY2012 the trails budget was actually cut 4% to \$81.982 million. As a result, by the beginning of FY2013, the system had accumulated a backlog in trail maintenance of \$314 million, up from \$289 million the previous year. Currently, the agency is able maintain only a third of its trail miles to a minimum standard condition. In FY2013, even less funding will be available because of sequestration.

- *In light of the history and conditions we describe above, we urge the House to fund the U.S. Forest Service Capitol Improvement and Maintenance Trails account at its FY 2011 level of \$85,381,000 in FY 2014.*