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**Opening Statement: Chairman Calvert**

**FY 2015 Budget Hearing**

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

April 3, 2014 (1:30pm)

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Good afternoon and welcome to the Subcommittee's hearing on the President's FY15 budget for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I'm pleased to welcome Dan Ashe, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and Chris Nolin, the Service's Budget Officer.

The President's FY15 budget proposal for the Fish and Wildlife Service is roughly \$1.5 billion in current appropriations, which is \$49 million or 3.4 percent above the FY14 enacted level. In any budget climate, that is a healthy increase, and Director Ashe deserves credit for pushing it through the Department and OMB.

However, because of this Subcommittee's competing priorities outside of the Department of the Interior, because of our bipartisan commitment to correcting disparities in Indian country, and because this Subcommittee is viewed as the funding backstop for other must-do programs such as PILT and Wildland Fire, we view the Fish and Wildlife Service budget through a different lens than does the Department and OMB.

That is why I look forward to your testimony today and to working with you in the days ahead to enact a responsible though likely smaller budget that better balances what appear to be competing Administration and Congressional priorities.

By far the most pressing Fish and Wildlife Service issues in the District and State I represent have long centered on Endangered Species Act regulations. In my view, the ESA is long overdue to be updated. Its single-species policies ignore the latest principles of ecosystem science, and its inflexibilities regarding the allocation of scarce resources are dangerous at a time when society is coming to terms with major changes in weather and climate. It is my sincere hope that proponents of the status quo will come to the table, and work with Congress, to update, improve, and reauthorize the ESA.

In the meantime, this Subcommittee must address the question of whether and how to continue to invest in implementing current ESA policy. Many of my colleagues and I still feel that the 2011 settlement agreements were a raw deal. The pace of ESA listings has clearly accelerated despite modest yet annual budget cuts since 2010, and is further evidence that ESA listing activities are limited more by politics than by budget. It is an issue this Subcommittee will be considering closely for FY15, particularly in light of the Service's proposal to restructure its ESA budget.

In my opinion, the Service should put far more effort into prevention and recovery, rather than new listings. That is why the proposed \$8 million cut to the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program is troubling. This program partners with the States, Tribes, and Territories to conserve species so that ESA listings are unnecessary. In the coming weeks, the Subcommittee will be looking for offsetting cuts to restore this funding, along with considering whether and how to focus the program on the candidate species named in the 2011 settlement agreements.

The Service's very public announcement that prevention and recovery shall be the National Fish Hatchery System's highest priorities, while recreational fishing shall be its lowest, has caused quite a stir. In addition to the \$3.6 billion economic benefit that the hatchery system provides—a return of \$26 for every \$1 invested—many would argue that recreational fishing is one of the best ways to help America's youth develop a love of the outdoors. In light of the Secretary's proposed youth initiative in FY15, this Subcommittee will ensure that recreational fishing will continue to be a priority.

Again, though, I'd like to give Director Ashe his due credit. Setting priorities guarantees controversy, which is why agencies frequently publish strategic plans so watered-down that everything, and therefore nothing, is a priority. But what I'd like to know is this: Why not set similar priorities for the rest of the Fish and Wildlife Service? I think many Republicans would agree that preventing, recovering, and de-listing species ought to be higher priorities. If the Service is going to try to hold the National Fish Hatchery System to that standard, why not hold the rest of the Fish and Wildlife Service to the same standard?

It is a question that I know this Subcommittee will be considering in the coming days as it weighs its options for responding to the 2011 court settlements and the wave of ESA listings already underway.