

## 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 2015 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill  
April 10, 2014

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 2015 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

When deciding on funding that affects hundreds of millions of Americans, we urge you to take into account the full economic, social, environmental and cultural value of the many programs managed by this Subcommittee. Our public lands and waters contribute significantly to the U.S. outdoor recreation economy. The Outdoor Industry Association's latest report shows that outdoor recreation alone generates \$646 billion in direct consumer spending, supports 6.1 million direct jobs and generates \$79.6 billion in federal, state and local tax revenue.

Investments in these critical programs will provide jobs and protect the health and economic wellbeing of local communities. We urge bold, immediate action in support of conservation funding for Fiscal Year 2015. Specifically, TWS recommends:

### Wilderness Management

The 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act is September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014. This provides a unique and valuable opportunity to highlight the role wilderness plays in protecting ecosystems, wildlife, and primitive outdoor recreation opportunities across the country. America's National Wilderness Preservation System is a world renowned 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. We recommend that each of the agency wilderness management accounts be increased to provide trails maintenance, update signage, remove fencing, fight invasive species, restore degraded hydrology, and monitor effects of climate change, among other critical wilderness preservation system needs. Specifically:

- **Crosscutting**

Adequately fund the Carhartt Training Center, the Leopold Research Institute, and the Interagency Wilderness Character Monitoring Team to complete wilderness character baseline assessments using Wilderness Fellows.

- **Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Wilderness**

The budget proposal of \$18.435 million for BLM wilderness management is strong, but still 7% lower than the FY11 enacted level, the funding level necessary to ensure resource and visitor safety in the 221 BLM wilderness areas. *TWS supports restoring BLM Wilderness funding to the FY11 level of \$19.663 million.*

- **Forest Service Recreation, Wilderness and Heritage**

Recreation is the most ubiquitous use of our forest lands, connecting with more people and occurring on more acres than any other use, as well as accounting for more than half of all job and income affects attributable to Forest Service programs (over 190,000 jobs and \$11 billion in spending effects by visitors). *We urge Congress to support wilderness and recreation by restoring funding to the FY10 level of \$285.1 million for the Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness Program.*

- **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 reduce the likelihood of litigation due to management inconsistencies.*

### **Land and Water Conservation Fund**

Now in its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, 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 and protect national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, BLM 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, as well as important wildlife and recreational habitat and ensures that public lands stay public for hunters, anglers, and other outdoor recreationists for generations to come.

- *TWS strongly supports fully funding LWCF at the proposed \$900 million.* Full funding for LWCF will allow land management agencies to manage our public lands more efficiently and cost-effectively. This is achieved through strategic inholdings acquisition which reduces internal boundary line surveying, right-of-way conflicts and special use permits.

### **Emergency Wildfire Funding**

For years USFS and DOI have had to divert funds away from vital conservation and wildfire mitigation programs to cover wildfire suppression costs. This is having long term negative effects on conservation and land management, especially where these funds are diverted from programs aimed at reducing fire risks and costs, which creates a vicious cycle. With longer and more severe fire seasons the Forest Service has seen its wildfire management activities rise from 13% of the agency's budget in FY1991 to almost 50% for the past several fiscal years.

- *TWS strongly supports the President's proposal of \$954 million in new budget authority for wildfire suppression under the FLAME Suppression Cap Adjustment.* This will eliminate the need to rob other accounts to pay for the worst one percent of wildfires.

### **Climate Change Resiliency**

Wilderness, public lands, connected wildlife habitats and other types of "green infrastructure" are some of the most cost-effective investments that can be made to increase climate change resiliency. Connected wild landscapes allow species and habitats to adapt more easily to changes in climate, buffer local communities from storms and natural disasters and our national forests can be effective carbon sinks.

- *TWS supports the President's \$1 billion climate change fund to safeguard not only our public lands but our communities and our economy.*

### **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. The Administration has proposed these reforms of the BLM's oil and gas program, which TWS supports:

- *A fee on onshore federal operators sufficient to provide for a \$48 million per year inspection and enforcement program to implement recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office; Continuation of the \$6,500 APD fee; A \$4.00 per acre fee on non-producing onshore leases.*

### **Sage Grouse Initiative**

The Wilderness Society supports the administration's \$15 million request for the BLM's National Greater Sage Grouse Planning Strategy. If successful, implementation of this strategy 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 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 Areas and other designations. Stewardship of the Conservation Lands 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 2015 recommendation of \$66.5 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 clean energy economy by developing our renewable energy resources responsibly. We believe renewable energy is an appropriate and necessary use of the public lands when sited in areas screened for habitat, resource, and cultural conflicts. TWS hopes the Department will continue to support a program that ensures our public lands can play an important role in supporting renewable energy infrastructure through environmental review, suitability screening, and energy zone identification to find suitable places for needed renewable energy projects. TWS is also a supporter of Secretarial Order 3330 on Mitigation that would ensure that any impacts are avoided or offset. TWS urges Congress to:

- *Support increased funding for renewable energy programs across Interior from FY 14 enacted.*
- *Support the Department's request to fund BLM's renewable energy activity at no less than \$29 million to make up for the impact of sequestration.*
- *Increase funding for the FWS to review and permit renewable energy projects on public lands.*

### **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 funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System at the President's recommendation of \$476.4 million.*

## **National Forest Restoration**

The Legacy Roads and Trails (LRT) and Collaborative Forest Restoration Programs (CFLR) provide essential funding to restore watersheds, improve recreational access by focusing on roads and trails where water quality and aquatic species are at risk and advance collaborative restoration projects. Despite its success, the LRT program was slashed 50% in FY 11 and again in FY 14 by 22%. We 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 proven that IRR can improve restoration outcomes without a loss of program transparency and accountability. To achieve restoration goals in FY15, TWS recommends that Congress:

- *Restore Legacy Roads and Trails funding to \$45 million within Capital Improvement and Maintenance;*
- *Fully fund the CFLRP at the President's recommendation of \$60 million*
- *Extend the IRR pilot program, and works closely with the Forest Service and stakeholders to ensure transparency and accountability for the activities and outcomes of the pilot program.*

## **Forest Service Inventory & Monitoring and Planning**

The Inventory and Monitoring is integral to forest planning serving both as the baseline data and trigger for course correction. The Planning Program funds amendments and revisions to Land Management Plans, the overarching documents that guide the management of individual forests and grasslands. By providing adequate and consistent funding to both these programs, we advance plans and projects, and avoid bad decision-making, unnecessary costs, and more risks to water quality and quantity, wildlife, and recreation. TWS recommends that Congress:

- *Support Inventory & Monitoring and Planning by restoring funding to the running 10-year average of \$163,689,000 and \$48,254,000, respectively.*

## **National Forest Roads**

Over the past four years, Forest Service roads funding has been cut by 30% adding even more strain to a road system where the collective cost continues to far outstrip the Forest Service's financial capacity. Roads are one of the most significant stressors on watersheds and ecosystems, contributing to water pollution and declines in salmon, trout and other fish. Adequate funding for the road system is needed to address public safety issues, the negative effects of roads on wildlife and water, and provide high quality recreational access to the American public. Adequate funding will also ensure that previous taxpayer investments in our forest infrastructure are not squandered through lack of maintenance.

- *We urge Congress to fund Capital Improvement and Maintenance Roads at the running 10-year average of \$207,383,000 in FY 2015.*
- *We recommend that Capital Improvement and Maintenance Roads funds are available for maintenance and operations, reconstruction, limited construction, and decommissioning.*

## **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. In FY2014 the trails budget was cut nearly 9% to \$75 million, despite the fact that the Government Accountability Office reported in June 2013 that the agency has more than a \$500 million trail maintenance backlog. Currently, the Forest Service is able to maintain only a third of its trail miles to a minimum standard condition.

- *In light of the history and conditions we describe above, we urge Congress to fund Capital Improvement and Maintenance Trails at its FY 2010 level of \$85,381,000 in FY 2015.*