

Terry Mansfield, Landowner, Cheney, WA and Board Member of Partners for Conservation
Testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Other Related Agencies Concerning Fiscal Year 2015 Appropriations

April 10, 2014

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Moran and members of the Appropriations Subcommittee:

On behalf of myself and Partners for Conservation (PFC), thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the fiscal year 2015 Interior Appropriations Bill. I am a rancher and consulting wildlife biologist from eastern Washington. PFC is a landowner-led non-profit organization for which I serve as a Board member. As ranchers and farmers working cooperatively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we respectfully request that the Subcommittee support the following funding allocations for FY 2015:

Funding of \$75 million for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program;

Funding of \$55 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund;

Funding of \$14 million for the Habitat Joint Ventures within the North American Waterfowl Management Plan Program;

Full funding of \$900 million authorized for the Land and Water Conservation Fund; and

Funding of \$58.7 million for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program.

As a Board member of PFC, I want to share with you some background on the organization. We operate under the following principles: *Collaboration gets work done; Local lessons have national impact; Voluntary and incentive-based programs create trust and foster success; and Sustainability is achieved by balancing ecological and economic needs.*

PFC is growing with the goal of landowner representation in all 50 states. We currently have Board member representation in states extending from Montana and South Dakota to New Mexico and from California to Florida. In 2013, under a partnership agreement with the National Wildlife Refuge Association, PFC hired an Executive Director to coordinate our efforts. We are also working hard to develop effective working relationships with Federal and state agencies, non-government conservation organizations and like-minded landowners nationwide. As an example, PFC annually hosts a *Private Lands Partners Day* event, this year set for late September in Starkville, Mississippi. In February, we hosted a Sensitive Species Forum attended by landowners and the leadership of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, including Director Dan Ashe. One of the primary goals of the Forum was to start a conversation on how to strengthen proactive private landowner involvement in managing sensitive fish and wildlife species while building trust and improving communication between landowners and the Service.

As noted previously, I live and work in eastern Washington. My wife and I own and operate a ranch near Spokane, WA where we raise cattle and sheep. Our goal is to sustain the livestock operation and enhance wildlife habitat on our property. In 2004, we voluntarily enrolled a

portion of our ranch in a permanent conservation easement under the US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (\$75 million)

So what motivates me to be involved with PFC and why am I here to testify in support of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife and other Federal programs named above? The simple answer is public and private partners need to work cooperatively to focus our energy and available funding on cost-effective programs to sustain agriculture while conserving our natural resources on private lands. This concept also recognizes the need to balance conservation programs with economics at the local community level. It is my firm belief that there is a “sweet spot” in which we can focus our collective efforts and leverage financial resources to sustain working agricultural lands while conserving our valuable natural resources. These objectives naturally fit together and PFC is all about getting it done through voluntary landowner support and working collaboratively with partners, including Federal government agencies. In my area of eastern Washington, over 75% of the land is privately owned, so the Federal agencies cannot do the job of conserving fish and wildlife without willing landowner support. I think this model for voluntary, cooperative conservation on working agricultural lands is the best example of how the US Fish and Wildlife Service can leverage the funding you and your colleagues in Congress provide on behalf of your constituents.

I want to share my story with you. Our ranch lies in what is known as the Channeled Scablands Wetland Focus Area. We are on the east side of the Columbia Basin, an area of continental significance for migratory birds and other wildlife. The ranch is adjacent to the 17,000 acre Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program staff assigned to the Refuge helped me complete a wetlands restoration project by providing technical assistance and native plants to enhance the wildlife habitat values within our wetlands and adjacent upland habitats. We were successful in integrating and leveraging the basic WRP conservation easement through USDA-NRCS with engineering by Ducks Unlimited, habitat restoration expertise by the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and technical assistance by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. It is that level of cooperative conservation which I think makes the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program work extremely well for landowners. Success was the result of voluntary partnerships.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program biologists have also helped several of my neighboring ranchers with wetlands restoration projects by cutting through the red tape involved in permitting processes, finding additional funding sources, including NRCS Farm Bill Programs, and developing restoration and management plans designed to achieve both ranching and natural resource conservation goals. In the last 25 years, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has helped more than 45,000 landowners restore and enhance over 1 million acres of wetlands, 3 million acres of uplands and 11,000 miles of streams nationwide. It has leveraged each dollar of appropriated funds to generate over \$8 in total project spending and over \$15 in overall economic returns. The Program is supported by landowners as highly cost-effective.

North American Wetlands Conservation Act (\$55 million); and Habitat Joint Ventures (\$14 million)

So why link the PFC and my request as a rancher increased funding of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to a request for additional funding for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) and Habitat Joint Ventures (JVs)? Simply stated, because they can be used as integrated tools to achieve voluntary conservation program goals on private lands in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

I support increasing funding for NAWCA to \$55 million to help increase wetland restoration on private lands as an important tool in priority areas, including the Columbia Basin of eastern Washington. Wetlands are one of the most important habitats for fish and wildlife, but their abundance and quality has been greatly reduced by a number of factors. The highly competitive cost-share grant program provided under NAWCA is extremely valuable to government agencies, tribes, non-government conservation organizations and private landowners nationwide. It is just one of the tools the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program biologists use to leverage resources to accomplish landscape level cooperative conservation on private lands.

With respect to the Habitat Joint Ventures (JV's), I support restoring funding to the level authorized in FY 2010 of \$14 million. Although the base funding for the JVs is provided through the US Fish and Wildlife Service's budget, these public-private partnerships are extremely effective in leveraging funding and staff resources specifically to conserve priority habitats for birds and other wildlife. I have experience working with the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) with a footprint of nearly 500 million acres in all or parts of 11 western states. In general, the JVs are self-directed and guided by Management Boards made up of diverse interests including representatives of government agencies, non-government conservation organizations, industries and private landowners. The JVs are extremely effective in collaborating with government agencies and, in my experience, very efficient in delivering habitat conservation programs on private lands in cooperation with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Together, the IWJV and Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program staff focus their efforts on Strategic Habitat Conservation, which means they focus their time and energy in priority fish and wildlife habitats, including those on private lands. I serve as the IWJV WA Conservation Partners Coordinator and have seen first-hand how the "Joint Venture Model" can leverage funding for habitat conservation at a ratio of 5:1 or greater. Coupled with the Partners Program, JVs are very beneficial to ranchers and farmers not only in Washington, but throughout the Country.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (\$900 million); and State and Tribal Wildlife Grants (\$58.7 million)

On behalf of PFC and myself, I respectively request full funding of \$900 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). It can be used to match and leverage other conservation funding, and it is very valuable to cooperative conservation partners nationwide in conserving priority fish and wildlife habitats on a large landscape scale. Conservation easements take advantage of willing partners entering into mutually beneficial agreements to sustain natural

resources and maintain existing agricultural land uses. A number of PFC Board members have first-hand experience from California to Florida and South Dakota to Kansas with extremely effective use of LWCF as a critical source of funding for voluntary large scale conservation easement programs on private lands. With much of the most productive fish and wildlife habitat on private lands, flexible tools are needed to sustain these valuable resources while avoiding the need for the Federal government to acquire fee title to land. By keeping these lands in private ownership, productive and contributing to local property tax bases, we can also support local economies and sustain both working agricultural operations and fish and wildlife populations in priority areas.

Finally, I respectfully request funding of \$58.7 million for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program. Along with the LWCF, the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program provides cost-shared grants to implement the State Wildlife Action Plans designed to keep common species common and help avoid the need to list species under the Endangered Species Act. This proactive approach combined with voluntary and incentive based conservation programs leverage Federal, state and private landowner funds to conserve fish and wildlife on working ranches nationwide.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. If you have any questions regarding my testimony, I will do my best to respond. We recognize the challenges you and your colleagues face in your decisions regarding the FY 2015 Budget. We also realize the value of sharing with you on-the-ground experiences using the proven and cost-effective programs in the Fish and Wildlife Service which work best for landowners willing to help conserve our natural resources while sustaining working agricultural lands nationwide.

Board members of PFC welcome you to visit any of our ranches to see first-hand how voluntary and incentives based conservation programs can work to benefit ranchers and farmers as well local economies nationwide. In light of the significant fiscal challenges you and your colleagues in Congress face, we need to set priorities and support programs which return the greatest benefits to the American people. We need your leadership and support by investing in community based landscape conservation through partnerships with private landowners. Government agencies cannot do it alone, and PFC stands ready to help.

Chairman Calvert and Subcommittee members, thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely

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