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**Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies for Fiscal Year 2015
Rosalyn Morrison, Legislative Assistant, Government and Legal Affairs
April 10, 2014**

On behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute, I want to thank Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Moran, and the distinguished Members of the Subcommittee for this opportunity to testify regarding funding for the agencies involved in white-nose syndrome research and management, as well as for other programs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service.

WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME (WNS)

\$2.5 million (President's budget) **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Science Support**

Purpose: To fund research on ways to stop the development and spread of WNS, and the fungus that causes it, among bat populations.

\$500,000 **U.S. Geological Survey/Ecosystems**

Purpose: To conduct research into WNS management to aid in the recovery of affected species and reduce the spread of the WNS fungus.

\$3 million **National Park Service/Park Management**

Purpose: To inventory and protect NPS bat and cave resources; expand research into WNS management; monitor NPS resources for WNS; conduct public education about WNS; and standardize WNS screening procedures for visitors across park units.

\$750,000 **U.S. Forest Service/Research and Development**

Purpose: To conduct research on managing WNS per the Service's WNS science strategy.

\$250,000 **U.S. Forest Service/Forest Systems**

Purpose: To inventory and monitor bat resources and manage WNS on Forest Service lands.

\$500,000 **Bureau of Land Management**

Purpose: To fund field research related to WNS in bats and the inventorying and monitoring of bat resources on Bureau-administered lands.

Capitalizing on the investments and progress already made, the funds we request would support federal programs to fight WNS, a disease the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates has killed at least 5.7 million bats since its 2006 outbreak. Caused by the invasive *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (*Pd*) fungus, WNS is present in 23 states and 5 Canadian provinces, and *Pd* in another 3 states. The disease or its fungus has affected 11 hibernating bat species so far, including the endangered Indiana, gray, and Virginia big-eared bats; 25 of our nation's 47 bat species may ultimately be at risk. Losses are so severe that FWS published a proposed rule to list the northern long-eared bat as endangered throughout its range, which is most of the eastern U.S., and is reviewing another two species for possible listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The loss of bats from WNS will likely have serious implications for our economy and environment. Bats are primary predators of night-flying insects, including agricultural pests that attack corn, soybeans, cotton, and other crops. By eating these pests, bats save farmers an average of \$22.9 billion per year by reducing the need for pesticides and lowering food

production costs. Bats also perform ecological services for 66 plant species that produce timber. Healthy forests need healthy bats.

The federal government and its state, local, tribal, and nonprofit partners continue to make progress in fighting WNS. Thanks to federal funding from previous years, these institutions are conducting research in line with the priorities identified at the 2014 WNS symposium: understanding the nature and dynamics of remnant bat populations in WNS-affected areas; understanding the nature and dynamics of *Pd* infectivity and virulence factors; and other questions such as biological control for WNS. These research directions hold promise for solutions to slow or stop the spread of the disease, and to alleviate its impacts on affected bats. In one of the past year's notable findings, Forest Service scientists taxonomically reclassified the WNS fungus from *Geomyces destructans* to *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*. A goal of the WNS community is to pinpoint the WNS fungus' harmful genes and silence them as a means of controlling the fungus; this research furthers that effort by shedding light on the genetic similarities and differences between the white-nose fungus and its closest, benign fungi relatives. Another positive development is the creation of the North American Bat Monitoring Program, which will be pilot-tested this summer. Until now, no coordinated or standard system for monitoring bat populations has existed within North America. As a result, wildlife managers and researchers have lacked accurate data on which to base appropriate bat management actions. The program will benefit not only the WNS fight but also other bat conservation efforts.

These developments would not have been possible without funding. We thank Congress for recognizing the gravity of the WNS crisis and supporting agencies' response to the disease in past years. We have come so far in understanding WNS and determining directions for the fight against this devastating disease. Failing to adequately fund WNS response in FY2015 will undermine our hard-won progress, jeopardize the application of science to management, and thwart the impact of private funds leveraged to combat WNS. We recognize today's difficult budget situation but urge you to provide funding at the levels noted above.

Money spent on WNS is a wise investment. Preventing the spread of WNS will spare businesses the regulatory and other impacts of massive bat die-offs. The experience gained will aid in responding to future fungal outbreaks that may affect human health. Finally, fighting WNS now will reduce future harm to the economy from insect-related losses to agriculture and forestry and the cost of listed-species recovery. An ounce of prevention truly is worth a pound of cure.

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE OFFICE of LAW ENFORCEMENT – \$66.737 million

The Administration's FY15 budget proposes a moderate funding increase for the FWS Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), one of the most important lines of defense for America's wildlife. OLE is tasked with enforcing over a dozen federal wildlife and conservation laws that frequently impact both domestic and global security. Year after year, OLE protects the public against the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products--which is third only to the illicit trade in narcotics and weapons in terms of revenue generated globally—and the U.S. remains a source of, or destination for, much of this contraband. Even those who may not concern themselves with wildlife are reaping benefits as OLE protects against smuggling illegal substances and helps to thwart potentially devastating human health threats. It is critical that OLE receive adequate funding to fulfill its mission.

Accordingly, we support FWS's proposed appropriation of \$66.737 million for OLE, an increase of \$1.994 million over the FY14 enacted budget, and the addition of seven full-time

employees. This increase in funding and staff will provide for expanded forensics capability at the National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory, support the work of Special Agents and Wildlife Inspectors, and enhance the Service's ability to combat wildlife trafficking.

National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory – \$1.247 million increase + 5 FTE

The successful outcomes of enforcement cases would not be possible without the essential work of the National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory (NFWFL), used by FWS agents and inspectors to gather hard evidence in wildlife crime cases. The lab uses state-of-the-art science, along with years of institutional knowledge, to identify wildlife products by species, determine the cause of death, and make other findings critical to a successful legal case. All 50 states and the 175 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) member countries depend on this facility to prosecute wildlife crimes.

It is heartening that \$1.247 million of the proposed \$1.994 million increase to OLE's budget and 5 of the 7 additional full time employees will be allocated to the NFWFL's work. This will aid in the advancement of research involving genetic markers and isotope analysis, which will ultimately improve investigators' ability to determine the geographic origin of animals and animal parts. These funds would also serve to develop the laboratory's Morphology Section, where there is a great need for both hiring and training of forensics experts.

Program Activities / Special Agents and Wildlife Inspectors – \$247,000 increase

The Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agents and Wildlife Inspectors who enforce U.S. wildlife laws play a critical role in protecting our nation's wildlife. Special Agents aid in the reduction of illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products, which continues to imperil species in the U.S. and around the world. Wildlife Inspectors play a similarly valuable role, minimizing illegal contraband shipments, uncovering smuggled goods and illegal trade rings at the border, and thwarting national and global health risks associated with importing non-native species.

In FY13, FWS Special Agents pursued 10,422 investigations involving 180,368 wildlife shipments, including 157,065 shipments containing foreign species. Agents identified 1,824 individuals/businesses conducting illegal activities involving migratory birds; 2,535 individuals/businesses engaged in crime involving threatened and endangered species; and 7,521 individuals/businesses conducting illegal activities involving foreign species. These enforcement activities resulting in \$24.6 million in fines and penalties, 45.9 years of jail time for the perpetrators, and 452.7 years of probation.¹

In the same year, FWS Wildlife Inspectors processed approximately 182,000 declared shipments of wildlife products worth over \$6.2 billion.² This impressive record merits proper funding and staffing adequate to fulfill OLE's mission.

Wildlife Trafficking – \$500,000 increase + 2 FTE

FWS's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) works to address complex wildlife trafficking cases, including cases involving critically endangered species. Poaching is on the rise internationally, and SIU's investigation and enforcement work is of critical importance to making the U.S. a part of the solution. Both the Administration's National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking and the President's Executive Order on combating wildlife trafficking highlight the prevention of wildlife crime as a national priority.

¹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement, Law Enforcement at a Glance (2014).

² *Id.*

Increasing its staff from 6 to 8 agents will provide SIU with the capacity to undertake a national investigation of the trade in ivory, including both importation and smuggling within the U.S., while continuing its national and international efforts to investigate rhino horn trafficking. We support FWS's request for \$500,000 (of the total \$1.994 million requested increase) and 2 additional full time employee positions (of the 7 total FTE requested for law enforcement).

WILD FREE-ROAMING HORSES AND BURROS ACT

The wild horse is as much a symbol of our American heritage as the image of Uncle Sam and baseball. Currently, America's wild horses are subjected to gross mismanagement and mistreatment by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which uses a significant portion of its budget to round up and warehouse wild horses and burros without credible evidence supporting the need for such removals as recently documented by a National Academy of Science study. Furthermore, since 2004, wild horses have been at risk of being sold to killer-buyers who make a profit by sending horses to slaughter for human consumption—in fact, in recent years, hundreds of wild horses were sold to at least one known killer-buyer.

In 1971, Congress acted to protect these wild animals and their natural habitat. For the last few years, this Committee has also called on the BLM to find humane solutions, but they ignore options and fail to act responsibly. It is now time for Congress to act decisively to ensure these animals are neither sent into holding facilities nor sentenced to slaughter. BLM's proposed budget includes a program increase of \$2.8 million for wild horse and burro management. These funds are to be used for population control research, including ongoing studies that “focus on developing more effective and longer lasting fertility control agents...”³ We support these efforts and request that any increase in appropriations under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act be used *solely* for implementation of humane, on-the-range management methods such as immunocontraception, and not unnecessary roundup.

Finally, we strongly support the continued inclusion of this “no-kill” language to ensure that BLM does not kill healthy wild horses and burros: *Provided, that appropriations herein made shall not be available for the sale or destruction of healthy, unadopted wild horses and burros in the care of the Bureau or its contractors.*

National Park Service Lethal Management of Native Wildlife

In recent years, the National Park Service (NPS) has significantly expanded its lethal control of native ungulates in contravention of its own legal mandates. During this time, the NPS has initiated lethal control of ungulates in a number of national parks (e.g., Valley Forge, Catoctin, Indiana Dunes, and Rock Creek) and is considering similar efforts in other parks. In each case, the NPS has misapplied its own statutes and policies and has failed to provide any credible site-specific data to justify its heavy-handed strategies. Though even the NPS concedes that ungulates are keystone herbivores, it is unwilling to allow ungulates to naturally influence ecosystem structure and function, as its own statutes and policies require. Therefore, we request that the following language, which would save taxpayer dollars, be included in the House Interior Appropriations bill: *No funds appropriated under this legislation shall be expended by the National Park Service to lethally control or kill native ungulates nor shall the National Park Service permit any entity, public or private, to kill said ungulates.*

³ U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management, Budget Justifications and Performance Information: Fiscal Year 2015 (2014).