



Chairman Ken Calvert

*Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

FY 2016 Budget Hearing: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

March 17, 2015

Opening Statement As Prepared

Good morning and welcome to the Subcommittee's hearing on the President's FY16 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 FY16 budget proposal for the Fish and Wildlife Service is roughly \$1.6 billion in current appropriations, which is \$136 million or nine percent above the FY15 enacted level. Included are proposals that the majority of Congress would likely support, such as a proposal to reduce the backlog of species that are recovered but not yet delisted. But current law requires discretionary spending to stay roughly level in FY16, which makes a nine percent increase for the Fish and Wildlife Service simply unrealistic.

A level budget generally leaves little room for the types of change that the Service is proposing. However, proposals highlighting a delisting backlog are an opportunity for us to pause and consider whether existing funds are being spent on the highest priorities. For example, the issue last year with a longhorn beetle species in California highlighted the fact that, while the Service may recommend that a species be delisted, years can go by before the Service can do the work necessary to propose a delisting—and even then only if a lawsuit forces them to do so.

Furthermore, the ESA mandates that such recommendations and proposals be based on outcomes of five-year status reviews which must be conducted for every listed species. The Service fails to meet this five-year deadline for too many species. Compounding the issue is the fact that some species get a status review and get recommended for delisting. Then five years go by, and instead of proposing to delist, the Service conducts another status review.

In their defense, the Service's budget is currently structured to force the endangered species program to have to choose, for example, between spending limited funds to save a species from extinction or to delist one that has recovered. Meanwhile, the majority of the Service's budget is immune from such difficult ESA choices but hamstrung by other competing mandates, as well as Administration priorities that are broadly authorized but not mandated.

Is it right to forgo that which the law requires, in order to pursue that which the law merely says is allowable? Is there enough room in the Service's budget for both? In light of the 2011 court settlement agreements and the recent surge of ESA listing considerations, and in light of the Service's proposal to consolidate its budget and do away with a specific line item for ESA recovery, I believe this Subcommittee has an obligation to look more closely at the Service's ESA budget, and to determine whether the Service is really equipped to handle the ESA's many

mandates. If the Federal Government isn't prepared to take on all of the responsibilities that come with an ESA listing decision, perhaps it shouldn't be listing those species in the first place.

Director Ashe, from the ESA, to sage-grouse, to the National Fish Hatchery System, to wildlife trafficking, we have much to discuss. I look forward to your testimony and to working with you in the days ahead to enact a responsible though likely smaller budget that balances so many competing priorities.

Before turning to my colleagues for their opening statements, I want to thank the Service for allowing Ms. Jackie Kilroy to detail to the Subcommittee for a second consecutive year, thereby continuing the Subcommittee's long tradition of Fish and Wildlife Service detailees that are second to none.

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