

TESTIMONY OF MARY BETH BEETHAM
DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS, DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
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Mister Chairman, Ranking Member and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am Mary Beth Beetham, Director of Legislative Affairs for Defenders of Wildlife. Founded in 1947, Defenders has more than one million members and supporters and is dedicated to the conservation of wild animals and plants in their natural communities.

North America is fortunate to have some of the most abundant and diverse wildlife on Earth, more than 200,000 known species in the U.S. alone. This unique and irreplaceable heritage is treasured by all Americans both for its aesthetic value as well as for the very tangible benefits it brings as a resource. For example, a third of our food is pollinated by birds, bats, and insects; wildlife associated recreation generated \$145 billion in economic benefits in 2011;¹ bats provide at least \$3.7 billion to the agricultural industry in pest control services each year;² and the value of ecosystem services from habitat in the contiguous 48 states is estimated at \$1.6 trillion annually.³ Budget cuts since FY 2010 to Federal programs that conserve wildlife and habitat have severely undermined sound management. Continued cuts will likely lead to irreversible harm to vulnerable species and habitat. Our nation's wildlife is a treasure and well worth the investment to properly care for it.

Defenders also strongly opposed the inclusion of the sage-grouse rider in the final FY 2015 appropriations bill. We ask that the Subcommittee keep the FY 2016 bill free of this rider and any others that would undermine science-based decision making under the Endangered Species Act.

Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is our nation's premier wildlife conservation agency. FWS needs adequate funding, not cuts, if it is to recover threatened and endangered species and protect migratory birds and fish, species of global conservation concern and other trust species, and stop or prevent wildlife crimes. After adjusting for inflation, appropriations for Ecological Services have steadily declined after 2010, despite the addition of almost 280 listed species since then.

Cooperative Recovery – Defenders supports the President's requested increases of \$2.5 million in Conservation and Restoration under Ecological Services, \$2 million in National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance, and \$300,000 under Migratory Bird Management. This initiative is supporting more efficient and strategic efforts across landscapes to recover threatened and endangered species on National Wildlife Refuges and surrounding lands.

Renewable Energy – Defenders supports the President's requested increases of \$1.2 million in Planning and Consultation under Ecological Services to support approvals of renewable energy projects while ensuring they comply with relevant environmental laws, and \$1.4 million under Service Science to assess potential impacts of energy transmission corridors on sensitive lands and wildlife in the West and to identify mitigation strategies.

Endangered Species – The President's request again proposes a major restructuring of the Ecological Services Activity, which includes the Endangered Species program. Defenders continues

to be concerned about whether the new structure will allow for adequate transparency and accountability, particularly in the large “General Program Activities” program elements. Before any such restructuring is permitted, the agency must show that it has adequate controls in place to ensure the strategic use of this funding and a transparent process for developing priorities and reporting how funds are allocated. Absent this information, Defenders supports maintaining the current budget structure and supports the requested increases for the endangered species portion of Ecological Services, \$23.2 million, which includes:

- A \$4 million increase to support the unprecedented effort to conserve the greater sage-grouse and its sagebrush habitat, part of a new sagebrush steppe initiative for FY 2016.
- A \$2.5 million increase for listing that will support progress in listing decisions for approximately 145 candidate species, many of which have awaited Endangered Species Act (ESA) protection for years.
- An \$11 million increase to support the recovery of the more than 1,500 listed U.S. species so that ESA protection is no longer necessary.
- A \$5.5 million increase for consultation so that development projects can move forward in compliance with section 7 of the ESA.
- Defenders opposes a \$1 million reduction for the Wolf Livestock Loss Demonstration Program that assists livestock owners co-existing with wolves, and we urge its restoration.

National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) – Our National Wildlife Refuge System is the largest land and water system in the world dedicated to wildlife conservation. Refuges provide enormous benefits to the American people, generating \$2.4 billion each year for local economies. Defenders supports the \$34 million increase in the request which includes funding for inventory and monitoring and for Challenge Cost Share projects to build resiliency in the face of climate change. We also support legislative language proposed by the administration that would provide authority to recover compensation from responsible parties who injure or destroy Refuge System or Hatchery System resources similar to that of the National Park Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and allows compensation to be applied directly to repair the injury without further appropriation by Congress.

Science Support – The requested \$14.7 million increase will help to answer pressing questions about climate adaptation and other landscape level ecological changes as well as about energy development impacts and mitigation for sensitive species, White-Nose Syndrome that is devastating bat populations, and other agency management challenges.

Migratory Bird Management – U.S. bird populations have experienced precipitous declines in recent years. Defenders supports the \$7.1 million requested increase which includes funding for building resilience of bird species and their habitats through the Joint Venture partnerships.

Environmental Contaminants – Under Ecological Services, a requested \$1.2 million increase in Planning and Consultation will help to support the process for national consultations related to pesticide registrations and a requested \$2 million increase in Conservation and Restoration will help increase capacity to respond to impacts of contaminant releases.

Office of Law Enforcement – An \$8.7 million increase requested by the President will support needed wildlife science forensics experts, intelligence agents, and special agents to combat the unprecedented level of illegal trade in wildlife

Other key grant programs – Defenders supports the requested funding amounts for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Fund, and the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund (CESF) and for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants. In addition, we are opposed to the request to fund non-land acquisition planning and conservation grants from the Land and Water Conservation Fund under the CESF.

Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (FS) are essential to the conservation of wildlife and their habitat in the United States, yet their allocated funding is inadequate to address significant challenges to sustain these resources. A top priority for Defenders is ensuring that development on these lands proceeds in a sustainable way that maintains the ecological integrity of our public lands and waters, conserves wildlife habitat and populations, and contributes to agency efforts to successfully recover our most imperiled wildlife. We urge strong oversight to ensure that any energy development is done in an environmentally sensitive fashion and in low conflict areas. Given their large land ownerships it is imperative that both participate fully in landscape level conservation and management efforts. We are encouraged by BLM's innovative efforts in the Western Solar Program and consider it an example of how land management agencies can improve landscape level decision-making for energy development.

FS Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR)/Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management – The administration has again proposed merging a number of accounts, including Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management, into an integrated budget. Instead, Defenders supports maintaining funding for Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management at no less than the FY 2015 level of \$140.5 million and continuing IRR as a pilot until the agency demonstrates its ability to adequately protect habitat for fish and wildlife under the consolidated program. Defenders continues to be concerned that wildlife program activities may be marginalized under IRR and that hard timber targets may detract from integrated restoration.

FS Land Management Planning/Inventory and Monitoring – The request again proposes merging these two programs into a single line item. As with IRR, Defenders is concerned about consolidating these functions unless and until the agency can demonstrate its ability to carry out its responsibilities under each program independently. We urge continued discrete funding as separate programs at no less than the FY 2015 level.

FS Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program – We support the requested increase of \$20 million for this proven cost-effective program established specifically to stabilize employment, offer a reliable wood supply, restore forest and watershed health, improve wildlife habitat, and reduce both the costs of fire suppression in overgrown forests and the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires.

FS Forest and Rangeland Research (FS R&D) – We are opposed to the \$4 million cut in the request for FS R&D, which includes a cut of \$2 million for Wildlife and Fish R&D. We urge funding at no less than the FY 2015 level of \$296 million which included \$27.1 million for Wildlife and Fish R&D. Adequate funding for this program is crucial in providing relevant tools and information to support sustainable management of National Forest System lands as well as non-federal forest lands. Generally, we are concerned that the Forest Service may lack adequate applied scientific capacity both in R&D and the National Forest System to implement critical planning and management actions, including the 2012 Planning Rule.

BLM Wildlife and Fisheries Management – Defenders supports the requested \$37 million increase for the new sagebrush steppe initiative as long as it is paired with strong science-based conservation measures to protect and restore the sage-grouse and 350 sagebrush-dependent species of conservation concern. We continue to be concerned that Federal plans being developed under the National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy will be inadequate to conserve the species as we reported in our analysis of the draft plans in *In the Red: How Proposed Conservation Plans Fail to Protect Greater Sage-Grouse*. We urge the Subcommittee to work with the agency to ensure that the plans are improved so that the final plans will be adequate to conserve and restore this iconic species.

BLM Threatened and Endangered Species Management – According to agency reports, the BLM has funding to implement only about 10 percent of the work it is required to do in recovery plans for ESA listed species on BLM lands, but the administration's request includes just a \$109,000 increase FY 2015. Defenders supports an increase of \$1 million over the request which simply restores the budget to the FY 2010 level and will better help move listed species to recovery.

BLM Renewable Energy – Full funding of the \$29.4 million request will help BLM to move forward with renewable energy development on public lands while avoiding areas with natural resource conflicts, including conflicts with sensitive wildlife species.

BLM Resource Management Planning, Assessment and Monitoring – The \$21.2 million increase in the President's request will support the sagebrush steppe initiative, data collection and monitoring and the development of a new geospatial initiative to better monitor ecological conditions and trends on the landscape.

U.S. Geological Survey

The U.S. Geological Survey provides the basic science necessary for conservation of fish, wildlife and habitat. We urge support for the following increases:

National Climate Change and Wildlife Science Center/Climate Science Centers – A \$10.6 million increase in the request will support scientific needs in planning for climate change adaptation and building resiliency of ecosystems.

Ecosystems – A \$19.3 million increase in the request will help to support development of crucial scientific information for sound management of our nation's biological resources including research into declines of native pollinators and measures needed to avoid harming sensitive wildlife, especially bats and birds, from renewable energy development.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Defenders supports the proposal in the request for full and permanent funding of LWCF that will help to save some of the 6,000 acres of open space, including wildlife habitat, that are lost each day in the U.S.⁴ Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ The 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation, USFWS, 12/12

² <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/332/6025/41.summary?sid=853248fd-6760-4341-93d0-2aceab9ea450>

³ The Economics Associated with Outdoor Recreation, Natural Resources Conservation and Historic Preservation in the United States, Southwick Associates, 9/29/11

⁴ http://www.fs.fed.us/openspace/coop_across_boudaries.html