

**Written Testimony of Bill Durkin, President
Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge
In Support of Funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System
Land and Water Conservation Fund, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
The Honorable Ken Calvert, Chairman
The Honorable Betty McCollum, Ranking Member**

March 13,2015

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee: I am Bill Durkin, President of The Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Biddeford, Maine.

I have been a member of the Friends of Rachel Carson NWR for the past 26 years. The group was founded in 1987; we are a small group of about 200 members. This time of the year all of the letters go out to Congress asking for support of the refuge. I have given numerous written statements over the years and we really appreciate your support in the past. This year, our refuge is not requesting any appropriations directly for Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge; this is a request for general funding of the National Wildlife Refuge System of \$508.2M. This year we ask to appropriate \$60 million in the National Wildlife Refuge Fund. I also urge the sub-committee to fund the Land , Water and Conservation Fund at full funding at \$900M with a \$178.8M of that request for the National Wildlife Refuge Systems purchase of easements and in holdings. I thank you all for your consideration.

The Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge is named in honor of one of the nation's foremost and forward-thinking biologists. After arriving in Maine in 1946 as an aquatic biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rachel Carson became entranced with Maine's coastal habitat, leading her to write the international best-seller *The Sea Around Us*. This landmark study, in combination with her other writings, *The Edge of the Sea* and *Silent Spring*, led Rachel Carson to become an advocate on behalf of this nation's vast coastal habitat and the wildlife that depends on it. With the recent 50th anniversary of the publication of *Silent Spring*, her legacy lives on today at the refuge that bears her name and is dedicated to the permanent protection of the salt marshes and estuaries of the southern Maine coast. The refuge was established in 1966 to preserve migratory bird habitat and waterfowl migration along southern Maine's coastal estuaries. It consists of 11 refuge divisions in 12 municipalities protecting approximately 5,600 acres within a 14,800 acre acquisition zone.

Consisting of meandering tidal creeks, coastal upland, sandy dunes, salt ponds, marsh, and productive wetlands, the Rachel Carson NWR provides critical nesting and feeding habitat for the threatened piping plover and a variety of migratory waterfowl, and serves as a nursery for many shellfish and finfish. The salt marsh habitat found at Rachel Carson NWR is relatively rare in Maine, which is better known for its dramatic, rocky coastline. Upland portions of the landscape in and around the refuge host a unique,

unusually dense concentration of vernal pools that provide habitat for several rare plant and animal species. Located along the Atlantic flyway, the refuge serves as an important stopover point for migratory birds, highlighted by shorebird migration in the spring and summer, waterfowl concentrations in the winter and early spring, and raptor migrations in the early fall. In fact, southern Maine contains a greater diversity of terrestrial vertebrates, threatened and endangered species, and woody plants than any other part of the state.

Previous years' appropriations have allowed the USFWS to conserve several properties within the refuge at Biddeford Pool, Parson's Beach, the newly created York River Division and most recently at Timber Point. All of these purchases provide an important buffer between the intense development pressure along the southern Maine coast and its fragile coastal estuaries. With towns in the area growing rapidly – at rates ranging between 11 percent and 32 percent over the next ten years – development pressures continue to spiral upwards and additional coastal properties are under threat. It is said that Rachel Carson NWR has the most neighbors/abutters than any other refuge in the system, thus demand for available land is high and the market value expensive.

In FY10, Rachel Carson NWR was appropriated \$3M from the LWCF toward the acquisition of a majestic 157 acres of coastal land : Timber Point. Located in the Little River Division of the refuge on the Biddeford/Kennebunkport town line, Timber Point is comprised of a large peninsula and a small island that is effectively connected to the peninsula at low tide. All told, the property includes over 2.25 miles of undeveloped coastline, an enormous amount for southern Maine. The Timber Point parcel enhances the refuge's ability to protect water quality in the estuary and important wildlife habitat by linking it to already conserved refuge lands in the Little River Division of the refuge. This is a Success story. Your committee supported this project in 2009 and we acquired the land in December, 2011. The total purchase price was \$5.2M. We privately fundraised \$2.2M with the help of collaborative working partners. A classic story of using federal funds and local private donations toward the purchase of an iconic parcel of land. Since then, we have built a National Recreational Trail (NRT) for public use and recently completed an Environmental Assessment for future use of the property. Protecting Timber Point was a priority for the refuge for decades, and we thank you. The process does work and I support all Refuges requests for FY16. You can make it happen.

*** 1. We are requesting an overall funding level of \$508.2 Million in FY 2016 for the Operations and Maintenance Budget of the National Wildlife Refuge System, managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. All of the refuges are in dire need of staffing and upkeep. The National Wildlife Refuge System is responsible for 568 million acres of lands and waters, but currently receives less than a \$1. per acre for management costs. The refuges cannot fulfill its obligation to the American public, our wildlife and 47 million annual visitors without adequate funding. In the Northeast, Region 5, needs an additional \$1.5M for FY16 to keep even in their operating budget. In addition , they are on a hiring freeze therefore they can not offer their best programs due to the simple fact that only 25% of the budget goes to operations. Refuges provide unparalleled opportunities to hunt, fish, watch wildlife and educate children about the environment. An investment in the nation's Refuge System is an excellent investment in the American

economy, generating \$2.4 billion and creating about 35,000 jobs in local economies. Without increased funding for refuges, wildlife conservation and public recreation opportunities will be jeopardized. We fully supported the US Fish and Wildlife's request of \$508.2 Million for Operation and Management for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

*** 2. Appropriate \$60 million in the National Wildlife Refuge Fund in FY16 which offsets losses in local government tax revenue because lands owned by the Refuge System are exempt from taxation..

*** 3. We are requesting \$173.8M in LWCF funding for Refuge land acquisitions/conservation easements and we call for full funding of LWCF at \$900M. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is our nation's premier federal program to acquire and protect lands at national parks, forests, refuges, and public lands and at state parks, trails, and recreational facilities. These sites across the country provide the public with substantial social and economic benefits including promoting healthier lifestyles through active recreation, protecting drinking water and watersheds, improving wildfire management, and assisting the adaptation of wildlife and fisheries to climate change. The quality of place is greatly enhanced. As you know, LWCF uses no tax payer dollars. Instead, LWCF funds are primarily derived from oil and gas receipts paid to the federal government by oil companies that extract publicly owned resources from the Outer Continental Shelf. Congress created LWCF as a bi-partisan promise to return precious resources back to the American public by using these funds specifically for conservation and recreational purposes. Unfortunately over the 50 year history of LWCF, over \$18 billion has been diverted from the original conservation fund purpose. For all these reasons, LWCF needs to be funded at the \$900.Million level in FY16. Created by Congress in 1964 and authorized at \$900 million per year (more than \$3 billion in today's dollars), the LWCF is our most important land and easement acquisition tool. In the President's budget, he has included full funding for LWCF programs at the \$900.M level, and I support the Administration's commitment to fully funding the program. I urge a minimal commitment of \$173.8 M to the National Wildlife Refuge System. This wise investment in the Land and Water Conservation Fund is one that will permanently pay dividends to the American people and to our great natural and historical heritage. The Land and Water Conservation Fund should be fully funded at \$900 million annually - the congressionally authorized level. LWCF is good for the economy, it is good for America's communities and their recreational access; it is critical for our public lands and wildlife habitat.

The Land, Water and Conservation Fund has provided incredible benefit to the State of Maine. We have four national Wildlife Refuges and our only National Park, Acadia, attracts a huge amount of tourist each year and offers great recreational activities to the local citizens of the State. LWCF and the Forest Legacy program have conserved tens of thousands of acres in our interior forestlands and ensures that forestry and recreational access for all will be a huge part of our economy for generations to come. As a Mainer, I also wanted to highlight the importance of LWCF funding to other parts of the state beyond Rachel Carson NWR. We have a Crown Jewel of the national park system at

Acadia National Park, which will celebrate its centennial in 2016 and has continuing LWCF acquisition needs. Millions visit Acadia every year. And we have incredibly valuable private forests whose permanent protection through Forest Legacy Program funding means that our tourist and timber industries -- our two largest - can thrive together. I just visited the rural town of Phillips, Maine where I enjoyed cross country skiing on a trail on a just-completed Forest Legacy project, and I spent my money locally on lodging, food and equipment. So, LWCF funding for conservation in Maine is critical to the rural economy and National Wildlife Refuges. And it is matched by other funding, and enjoys broad support from forest landowners, snowmobilers hikers and birdwatchers alike. I cannot emphasize enough how important LWCF funding is to Maine and the remaining 49 United States.

I again extend our appreciation to the Subcommittee for its ongoing commitment to our National Wildlife Refuge System and respectfully request the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee allocate \$508.2M for the Refuge System's FY16 Operations & Maintenance Budget, \$60M in the National Wildlife Refuge Fund and \$178.8M in Refuge LWCF monies. We need Congress to stand by their commitment that was made in 1964 : stabilize the LWCF at \$900M.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to present this testimony in support of protecting wildlife and it's habitat. Enjoy your next walk out on a National Wildlife Refuge.

Bill Durkin
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