

STATEMENT OF

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COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES  
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Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Steve Kline, and I am the Director of Government Relations at the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, a coalition of more than 40 of the leading hunting and angling conservation organizations, that is working to guarantee every American quality places to hunt and fish.

My testimony today will focus on five specific funding areas: the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (or NAWCA), the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the State Wildlife Grants Program, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and sage-grouse habitat conservation.

Keeping the greater sage-grouse off the endangered species list is a national conservation priority; achieving that goal requires coordination between states, federal land managers, and private landowners. But coordination must inevitably result in conservation—on-the-ground habitat restoration and resource decision-making that demonstrably results in more birds. By providing robust funding levels for sagebrush-steppe ecosystem conservation to the BLM, Forest Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service in fiscal year 2016, Congress can help to ensure that land managers can conserve and restore sagebrush-steppe habitat, for the productive future of sage-grouse, mule deer, and pronghorn antelope.

Appropriations for NAWCA, State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, and Partners for Fish and Wildlife are also at the top of sportsmen's priority list. Federal funding stakeholders often refer to their favorite programs as "investments," and that is a word that applies particularly well to these three grant programs, each of which can be measured by their returns in both matching dollars and conservation results. Each federal dollar invested in these grant programs is matched, on average, three times over by non-federal dollars, and in some cases the match is even more significant. What this means in application is that even a minimal increase in funding for these grant programs will have a major on-the-ground impact, and of course the reverse is true: even minimal reductions in funding to programs like NAWCA and Partners for Fish and Wildlife will have outsized negative impacts. For every dollar cut, at least three dollars, and in many cases much more, will not be used for measurable, boots-in-the-mud conservation work. Sportsmen have long supported NAWCA, State Wildlife Grants, and Partners for Fish and Wildlife, and—given the strong demand and bullish ROI—we encourage the Committee to consider reasonable funding increases for these three priorities.

Finally, my testimony today would not be complete without mentioning the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This year marks a seminal moment in this program's history. If not reauthorized in September, the Fund will become unhitched from its dedicated funding source, offshore energy royalties. In September 2014, TRCP, along with 15 key national sporting groups, produced a report outlining the importance of

LWCF to America's hunters and anglers. I'd like to submit that report for the record, and note that this program is critical to the future of sportsmen and –women in this country. From improving access on federal lands to conserving private-land habitat with voluntary easements, LWCF is having a profoundly positive impact on the outdoor recreation landscape, and we encourage appropriators to provide robust funding levels for the program and to support a more permanent and mandatory solution this Congress.

I will close with a note of appreciation for this Committee's support of the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. While there is no need to get into the particulars of that legislation today, it is important to note that, fire borrowing is needlessly costing American taxpayers, as prevention programs are short-changed. The reality that appropriators must try and anticipate the cost of these natural disasters, and subsequently attempt to fund those costs via appropriated funds, comes with sweeping impacts across the entire Interior and related agencies' portfolio. TRCP will continue to lead on this issue, and we look forward to working with the committee to move the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act over the finish line.

America's natural resources are the infrastructure of a robust outdoor recreation economy, one that accounts for \$646 billion in direct consumer spending and more than 6 million jobs. Of that total, hunting and angling powers a \$90-billion annual economic engine, with billions more contributed directly to state and federal revenues.

Despite the obvious benefits of a robust outdoor recreation economy and productive, accessible natural resources, conservation programs are frequently the target of budgetary cuts that, while having virtually no meaningful impact on the federal deficit, have profoundly negative long-term impacts. In the end, we are costing ourselves far more resources than we're saving—dollars *and* habitat. As I have illustrated today, returns on conservation investments include jobs, increased tax revenues, non-federal dollars that far outstrip the initial federal commitment, and importantly, better days afield for America's hunters and anglers, who are part of an outdoor recreation tradition that is the envy of the world. With reasonable investments in those programs, we can all reap these many benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.