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**Testimony for the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee**  
**March 18, 2015**

Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum, on behalf of more than one million members and supporters of Audubon, I thank you for the opportunity to express to your Committee our recommendations for Fiscal Year 2016 funding of Department of the Interior and Environmental Protection Agency. **Audubon has been protecting birds, wildlife, and the habitat that supports them for over 100 years. Our national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in positive conservation experiences.** The purpose of our testimony is to recommend levels of funding for specific programs that are vital to our mission.

**The President's FY 2016 Budget Request**

Audubon is highly supportive of the President's FY 16 proposed budget for conservation, restoration, and the environment. However, we carry strong concerns over the proposed diversion of critically needed and currently dedicated funding for coastal Louisiana and the Mississippi River Delta. The Mississippi River Delta is a national treasure that is home to millions of Americans and provides vital habitat for birds and wildlife. We are currently losing 16 square miles of wetlands a year in the region. This landscape deserves our full attention.

**Everglades Restoration**

The Restoration of America's Everglades has long been a priority for Audubon. We are grateful to the Committee for its long-standing support of restoration for this important ecosystem through the appropriations process. The President's budget request of \$64.6 million for America's Everglades will help protect and restore this unique natural treasure.

Audubon believes that there is a serious problem in the Everglades with invasive exotic species. Numerous invasive plant and animal species are changing the conditions of native habitat. One acute issue that needs to be addressed is combatting invasive plant species in the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Under a license agreement with the South Florida Water Management District of the State of Florida, the Refuge is required to control exotic plants by 2017. Despite significant progress in meeting this challenge, under current funding levels, the Refuge will struggle to meet this requirement.

A total of \$6 million per year for the next 4 years has been identified as the funding level needed to ensure compliance with this lease agreement and \$2 million after that for maintenance. The FY 2016 budget requests only \$2 million for this purpose. We ask that you appropriate an additional \$4 million toward this important goal. With that addition, **Audubon recommends that the Committee appropriate \$68.6 million to the Department of Interior for Everglades Restoration in FY 16.**

### **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**

LWCF is crucial to Audubon's mission to protect and establish habitat strongholds for birds and wildlife. The current rapid rate of habitat loss is threatening the populations of dozens, if not more, species of birds and other wildlife. We urge the Committee to **appropriate \$400 million for LWCF out of discretionary spending in FY 16.**

### **State and Tribal Wildlife Grants**

This valuable program provides matching grants for design and implementation of habitat and wildlife conservation plans and allows states to conserve and restore declining native species prior to a necessity to list them as endangered or threatened. **Audubon supports the President's request of \$70 million for this program in FY 16.**

### **National Wildlife Refuge System**

America's Refuge System faces a massive multi-billion dollar backlog of operations and maintenance needs that is widely recognized as a handicap to Fish and Wildlife Service efforts to conserve and protect the System's more than 94 million acres of prime habitat for more than 2,000 bird and wildlife species. Robust funding is needed to provide adequate services for the millions of birdwatchers, sportsmen, and others who enjoy the outdoors at their local wildlife refuges. **We call on the Committee to fund the National Wildlife Refuge System to \$508.2 million in FY 16.**

### **Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund**

We firmly believe that the Endangered Species Act is one of our nation's most important environmental laws. We continue to have concerns for this program and the need to prevent the loss of irreplaceable species and biological diversity. **Audubon urges the Committee to appropriate \$50.09 million in FY 16.**

### **Neotropical Migratory Birds and the Multinational Species Fund**

The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) passed the Congress in order to reverse the decline of migratory birds that breed in the U.S. by protecting their habitats in Latin America and the Caribbean. Approximately 500 of the existing 800 species of birds found within the United States migrate across the nation's borders annually. For a great number of these species, this region contains almost the entire world population of these birds in the non-breeding season. The demand on this program is great, despite its' 3:1 match requirements. Every year since the programs inception, the demand has outstripped the supply of grant dollars. We appreciate the Committee's support for this program in past years, and hope to see that

support continue, in light of the importance of conservation grant programs that are highly leveraged, and in light of the high demand on the program. **We support the President's budget request of \$4.16 million for FY 16.**

### **Migratory Bird Management (MBM) at FWS**

The Division of Migratory Bird Management, an asset to bird population conservation efforts, requires funding for the survey and monitoring of migratory bird populations, the use of sound science as a management tool, coordination of activities with other agencies, governments and NGOs, and the completion of conservation plans. **We urge the Committee to fund the DMBM at \$53.6 million in FY 2016.**

### **North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Joint Ventures**

Beginning in 2001, Congress recognized the effectiveness of the Joint Venture regional conservation approach by ramping up the level of administrative funding to organize this effort. That support continued through 2004 when full funding was realized to develop the capacity necessary to carry out the work spelled out by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan for wetland habitat conservation. Congress should be commended for its part of this important partnership, as it was the pivotal link that ensured ongoing success for all partners. Congress' continued commitment to the cause of cooperative conservation cannot be overstated, for without Congressional support, accomplishment by Joint Venture partners would be far less significant. **We respectfully encourage the Committee to fund Joint Ventures at \$18.59 million in FY 2016.**

### **North American Wetlands Conservation ACT (NAWCA)**

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act is a long-standing program that has been extremely effective in leveraging non-federal funds to protect, restore, and manage wetland habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. NAWCA provides federal cost-share funding to support the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. **Audubon recommends that the Committee appropriate \$34.14 million for NAWCA in FY 16.**

### **Long Island Sound Restoration**

The Long Island Sound Restoration Program exists within the EPA's Geographic Programs and strives to protect and restore the environmentally and economically vital resources of the Sound. In 1985, the Sound was one of the first three estuaries recognized under the National Estuary Program because it provides feeding, breeding, nesting, and nursery areas for a diverse variety of plant and animal life. More than 8 million people live in the Long Island Sound watershed, and the resultant development has led to increasingly poor ecosystem health.

Audubon continues to have concerns about the funding levels to restore and protect the Long Island Sound watershed. **We recommend that the Committee appropriate \$10 million in FY 16 for this vital ecosystem.**

Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to testify on Audubon's priorities for the Department of the Interior and the Environmental Protection Agency. I appreciate the fact that this is a large agenda, but the problems facing America's birds, wildlife and their habitat are daunting. We look forward to working with you to protect America's birds, wildlife and habitat.