



Chairman Ken Calvert

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

**FY 2017 Budget Oversight Hearing: Fish and Wildlife Service
March 15, 2016
Opening Statement**

Good morning and welcome to the Subcommittee's oversight hearing on the President's fiscal year 2017 budget for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I'm pleased to welcome back Dan Ashe, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and Chris Nolin, the Service's Budget Officer.

The president is proposing a \$59 million, or four percent, increase for the Fish and Wildlife Service, an increase which relies on gimmicks to skirt the cap on non-defense discretionary spending agreed to less than one year ago. So, while the Service's proposed budget is insightful insofar as the Service's priorities, it is not realistic. This subcommittee's challenge will continue to be to work within our allocation to ensure that the Fish and Wildlife Service has the budget necessary to carry out first and foremost those actions required by law, as opposed to those actions simply authorized by law.

Of greatest concern continues to be the Endangered Species Act budget. Despite the law's many mandates, actions continue to be driven by lawsuits. And other mandates such as recovery plans, five-year reviews, and status changes are put on a back burner. This is why listed species tend to stay listed, and why people are so frustrated by the Endangered Species Act. If the government is not prepared to carry out its full responsibilities under the law, then it should not be listing species in the first place.

Granted, the Fish and Wildlife Service deserves credit for delisting 15 species over the past eight years. But there is still a backlog of 49 waiting to be downlisted or delisted, 318 awaiting five-year status reviews, and 1,159 awaiting recovery plans. We will ensure that the agency has the budget needed in FY17 to continue to whittle away at these backlogs.

We will also ensure that the agency continues to whittle away at the maintenance backlogs at national wildlife refuges and national fish hatcheries. The National Wildlife Refuge System backlog, for example, has declined annually since 2012 but still exceeds \$1.1 billion. The proposed FY17 budget isn't enough to keep driving that number down, so the subcommittee will appropriate an amount that will. It is irresponsible for the Federal government to add to its estate if it can't even maintain what it already owns.

Last but not least, we will continue to arm the service with the resources it needs to combat international wildlife trafficking. The escalation of trafficking in recent years has put many

iconic species in grave danger, and has fueled the activities of those who are a threat to our national security.

Closer to home, the extended drought in California continues to threaten the nation's food security. California produces nearly half of the nation's fruit, nuts, and vegetables. It is the nation's largest dairy state. The drought has cost us \$1.8 billion in economic losses and well over 10,000 jobs. People are desperate. Unemployment and suicide rates are now among the highest in the nation.

Now, some people believe that California should return to the desert it used to be. But the fact is that this nation cannot afford to feed its people without California, and long-term reliance on food imports makes our nation vulnerable. We must save California agriculture.

Witnesses in previous hearings before this subcommittee have testified that the problem is simply not enough water. If that was really the case, then we should have been able to pump and store a good portion of this winter's El Niño rains. Instead we pumped less than last year. If the Fish and Wildlife Service had simply allowed the Bureau of Reclamation to pump the maximum allowable under the Biological Opinion, we could have pumped enough water to serve two million people for an entire year—the population of San Diego and San Francisco combined. Instead that water went out to sea, and it isn't coming back.

El Niño has proven that the problem is not quantity of water, but the regulation of water. And so much of the regulation is dictated by the Fish and Wildlife Service under the mandates of the Endangered Species Act, with wide latitude afforded scientific uncertainty, and a save-at-any-cost policy that borders on dogma.

Enough is enough. For the sake of the people of California who fuel the nation's largest economic engine, who grow the nation's largest fresh food supply, and who push the nation to the cutting edge of technology, we must reconsider what the Federal government is doing with our water. We must reconsider calling on the Endangered Species Committee.

I get that the Fish and Wildlife Service feels its hands are tied, which is why this is yet another policy matter banging on the front door of a statute long overdue for the reauthorization process. This is not about the Fish and Wildlife Service and it is not meant to be a criticism of any of the thousands of outstanding scientists and other employees of the Service who are faithfully executing the laws of the United States on behalf of the People and the natural resources we so highly value.

Along those lines, in closing, let me take a moment to recognize some of those employees in another part of the country that was recently featured so prominently in the news. I want to give a shout out directly to the men and women of the Fish and Wildlife Service who are working at, or in support of, the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. No doubt it was and continues to be a difficult ordeal for you and your families. I hope you'll take some comfort in knowing that, while the nation was glued to the press, your refuge neighbors – ranchers – came to your defense, and made Congress aware that cooperative conservation can work when landscape neighbors truly work together. For your collective efforts, we commend you.

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