



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

DEC 31 2024

The Honorable Cliff Bentz
Chairman
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bentz:

Enclosed are responses to questions for the record submitted to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Martha Williams following her appearance before your Subcommittee at the May 16, 2024, oversight hearing on the Fiscal Year 2025 budget request. These responses were prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to you on this matter.

Sincerely,

Pamela L. Barkin
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member

Questions for the Record
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
Oversight Hearing *“Examining the President’s Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Proposal for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”*
May 16, 2024

Questions from Rep. Jerry Carl

Question 1: Director Williams, adequate funding for the management of migratory birds and their habitat is critically important, wouldn't you agree? As you are likely aware, state fish and wildlife agencies rely on the valuable data derived from USFWS surveys and science to justify seasons, monitor trends, and weigh management decisions. As such I am deeply concerned that the proposed presidential FY25 budget for aspects of the Service's Migratory Bird Management (MBM) program hasn't risen to the level of need identified for some of the MBM program's most critical needs.

Specifically I'd like to point to the Conservation and Monitoring Account, which is proposed to be funded at \$40.8M, that falls grossly short of what states and partners have identified (\$53 million) as what is needed to support key needs for population monitoring and surveys, research, technical assistance and guidance, and species conflict reduction.

Coupled with the significant cut to NAWCA and I worry about the message that is being sent about federal waterfowl and wetland habitat efforts. Can you please outline for me how the Service intends to meet the critical needs for waterfowl monitoring at the requested funding level?

So if the need is higher than the request, what is a higher priority for the Service that these important surveys and NAWCA cannot be adequately funded?

Response: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) considers waterfowl and migratory bird monitoring to be a high priority, as demonstrated by the Service’s budget request for an increase of \$10.45 million over the FY 2024 enacted level for the Conservation and Monitoring Account. This account supports all surveys, monitoring, and assessment work, which provide the biological and scientific foundation for the establishment of our annual migratory game bird hunting seasons. The requested increase would support targeted investments in partner engagement, population monitoring and surveys, research, technical assistance and guidance, and species conflict reduction. The Service intends to meet critical needs for waterfowl monitoring at the requested funding level by rebuilding capacity and ensuring annual surveys are adequately funded.

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) will remain funded at flat or increased levels in FY 2025 under this request. NAWCA receives funding through both discretionary appropriations and mandatory sources including interest earned on the Wildlife Restoration account. NAWCA earned significantly more in interest in FY 2024 and the Service estimates that NAWCA will also earn significantly more in FY 2025 due to a variety of factors. This provides additional mandatory funds to fund the program at increasing levels despite the lower request for appropriations.

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The Service recognizes that demand for our programs and services often exceeds available funding and that difficult decisions must be made to balance the overall budget. The FY 2025 budget request focuses on addressing the Service’s critical capacity needs and investing in on-the-ground conservation. Other priorities in the requested funding include continued investments to modernize survey and monitoring programs, including advancements in the use of remote sensing for population surveys, refinement of online hunter/harvest surveys response platforms, and evaluation of new data streams in support of conservation and management decisions. Across the board, the Service’s and Department of the Interior’s budget work together to conserve migratory birds and their habitats.

Question 2: Director Williams, we have heard on multiple occasions about the need for more funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). If the need is as great as you have suggested, why would the Service advance a rule, and I am referring to the BIDEH rule, that has the potential to significantly restrict cooperative conservation efforts on the NWRS, not to mention add significant administrative burden and costs to a system you believe is not adequately funded?

To expand refuge boundaries (as you have recently proposed), to add administrative burden on your refuge staff, and then prohibit practices like cooperative agriculture just doesn't add up. I hope you are giving serious thought to rescinding or significantly retooling your proposed BIDEH rule.

Response: On December 19, 2024, the FWS withdrew the proposed BIDEH rule based on the significant number of public comments received, the complexity of the substantive comments received and the issues involved, as well as the requests from the public for further opportunities to review and engage with the FWS on the substance of this proposal.