

**Written Statement of Jeff Trandahl
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**House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**

**ALL IN FOR AMERICA250: PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS SUPPORTING
AMERICA’S SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL ON OUR PUBLIC LANDS**

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Thank you, Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify today about the impactful work NFWF and its public and private partners administer to support America’s public and private lands. As our nation approaches its 250th anniversary, this milestone invites not only celebration, but reflection on our shared responsibility to steward the lands and waters that define our national identity and sustain our communities.

From the earliest days of our nation, America’s public lands have played a central role in our economy, culture, and way of life. The semi quincentennial is an opportunity to renew our commitment to conserving these landscapes—voluntarily, collaboratively, and in ways that respect local communities—so they continue to support wildlife, recreation, working lands, and livelihoods for generations to come. Public-private partnerships are essential to meeting that challenge, and NFWF was created by Congress to help make those partnerships work.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is an independent, congressionally chartered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization created by bipartisan legislation and signed into law by President Reagan in 1984. Congress established NFWF with a clear purpose: to work with public and private partners to advance practical, voluntary conservation solutions that allow people and nature to thrive together. That mandate is especially relevant as we reflect on the past 250 years and look toward America’s next 250 years. Since our founding, we have played an increasingly large and impactful role conserving this precious American legacy. To date the Foundation has enabled a total conservation impact of more than \$12 billion across more than 23,900 projects nationwide. Last year alone, NFWF

awarded more than \$590 million in grants to support more than 800 projects, leveraging more than \$325 million in matching contributions and generating a total conservation impact of more than \$925million. By leveraging non-federal investment, encouraging voluntary participation, and supporting locally driven solutions, NFWF helps ensure that conservation on public and private lands remains durable, cost-effective, and broadly supported.

NFWF currently works with 13 federal partners, more than 65 corporate and foundation partners, and has funded work across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Territories. By blending public and private funding, NFWF makes strategic, landscape-scale investments that complement federal agency missions while respecting local priorities. Ninety-six cents of every federal dollar we receive is spent directly on conservation, and every dollar Congress directly appropriates to NFWF goes to on-the-ground conservation projects. Each of those federal dollars is matched with at least one non-federal dollar, ensuring strong return on taxpayer investment.

NFWF also operates with the highest standards of accountability and transparency. We notify Congress in advance of every grant we intend to award that has federal funds over \$10,000, and all grants are publicly available through our online grants library. Each year, NFWF undergoes an independent audit and has received an unqualified opinion—with no material weaknesses or deficiencies—for 17 consecutive years. We also consistently qualify as a low-risk auditee under Office of Management and Budget standards.

Supporting Voluntary Conservation on America’s Public Lands

Since 1984, NFWF has played a central role in supporting voluntary, collaborative conservation on America’s public and private lands—lands that are part of our shared national heritage and will define what we pass on at the nation’s 250th anniversary and beyond. We work alongside federal agencies, states, Tribes, local governments, NGOs, and private partners to deliver conservation outcomes that complement—not replace—federal responsibilities. Our grants support habitat restoration, species recovery, watershed health, and landscape resilience on lands and waters managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and many other federal agencies. These efforts reflect a core principle of America’s conservation legacy: that enduring success depends on voluntary cooperation, shared investment, and respect for the people who live, work, and recreate on these lands.

Across decades of work, NFWF has invested billions of dollars in conservation projects, leveraging significant non-federal matching funds to multiply the impact of federal investments. Our approach emphasizes locally driven, incentive-based solutions—projects that restore forests and rangelands, improve aquatic connectivity, reduce invasive species, and strengthen resilience to wildfire, drought, and natural disasters. By aligning

conservation goals with the needs of land managers, communities, and resource users, NFWF has become a trusted mechanism for delivering durable, bipartisan conservation outcomes on public and private lands.

Program Examples Demonstrating Public-Private Partnerships

Many of NFWF's contributions to public-lands conservation are best illustrated through the programs we administer in partnership with federal agencies and private funders. NFWF's unique Congressional authorization enables the Foundation to pool resources from multiple federal agencies and private partners into individual programs which increases these program's impact while helping multiple agencies meet their varying conservation objectives.

The Western Big Game Seasonal Habitat and Migration Corridors Fund supports voluntary conservation actions that protect and restore critical migration corridors, winter ranges, and seasonal habitats for elk, mule deer, pronghorn, and other big-game species across the West. NFWF delivers the program in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state wildlife agencies, Tribal governments, private landowners, and nonprofit conservation organizations. Through this program, NFWF works with federal and state partners to address habitat fragmentation, invasive vegetation, and barriers to wildlife movement on public lands. Funded projects include rangeland restoration and wildlife-friendly fencing improvements on BLM and U.S. Forest Service lands in Wyoming; juniper removal on BLM lands in northern Arizona to restore nearly 1,500 acres of mule deer winter range; and wildlife-connectivity and underpass projects in central Oregon that reconnect approximately 75 miles of migration corridor along U.S. Highway 97.

Similarly, NFWF's Great Plains Program advances voluntary conservation across one of the nation's most iconic grassland landscapes through partnerships with public agencies, Tribes, ranchers, and local communities. Funding for the program is provided through NFWF partnerships with federal agencies including the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management, along with state wildlife agencies and private philanthropic partners including Bezos Earth Fund, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, Altria (Altria Group), Cargill, Nestlé, Sysco, Burger King, Capri Holdings Ltd, Occidental (Occidental Petroleum Corporation), Marathon Oil, and Oxy. The program focuses on conserving interconnected grasslands and sustaining wildlife such as pronghorn and grassland songbirds. Since 2016, the program has funded more than 185 projects, awarding over \$82 million in grants and leveraging matching funds to generate more than \$175 million in total conservation impact. Projects include restoring and protecting more than 123,000 acres of prairie habitat in eastern Montana, improving habitat connectivity through wildlife-friendly

fencing across multi-state landscapes, and helping support conservation easements for priority grasslands in areas like the Nebraska Sandhills—ensuring these working lands remain working lands for generations to come.

NFWF also supports conservation across the National Wildlife Refuge System in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Over the past two decades, NFWF has awarded more than \$99 million, matched by more than \$60 million of non-federal funds, to fund conservation activities on refuges nationwide. The Foundation has supported habitat restoration, community engagement, volunteer capacity, and visitor services that enhance refuge management. Examples include restoring native prairie and pollinator habitat at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in Illinois, supporting wildlife viewing and education at Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge in Massachusetts, and expanding pollinator gardens at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Maryland.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in partnership with McDonalds will also be launching the Grazing and Ranching Conservation Initiative helps ranchers strengthen the long-term productivity and resilience of their operations while improving the health of America’s grasslands. Through this program, ranchers will receive funding and technical support to implement practices like rotational grazing, improved forage management, water infrastructure, and grassland restoration—approaches that boost soil health, increase drought resilience, enhance wildlife habitat, and sustain working lands. The program is built on a strong public-private partnership model, with NFWF leveraging federal conservation investments alongside funding from private companies and philanthropic partners to deliver on-the-ground results at scale. By aligning the economic needs of ranchers with conservation outcomes, GRACI demonstrates how collaborative partnerships can support rural livelihoods, protect grassland ecosystems, and deliver lasting benefits for both people and wildlife.

Finally, NFWF’s and Walmart’s Acres for America program demonstrates how public-private partnerships can achieve conservation on a national scale. Since 2005, this partnership with Walmart has protected and conserved more than 2 million acres across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico—far exceeding its original goal. Walmart’s more than \$70 million investment has been leveraged with public and private matching funds to generate a total conservation impact exceeding \$1 billion, conserving habitat, improving connectivity, and expanding public access to nature.

Through the Acres for America program, we demonstrate how private investments catalyze further public-private investment and deliver large-scale, durable conservation outcomes on working and public lands. The program has supported protection of more than 21,000 acres of a working ranch in Nevada, conserving sagebrush steppe and wet meadows critical for pronghorn, mule deer, and elk while keeping ranching viable and maintaining

public recreation access. In Maine's Rangeley Lakes region, nearly 14,000 acres of actively managed forestland were conserved to sustain timber production, protect cold-water fisheries, and provide habitat for species such as Canada lynx, moose, and migratory birds. Additional investments have conserved 70,000 acres of sustainably managed working forest and wetlands in Wisconsin, 44,000 acres in Alaska linking private lands to millions of acres of intact salmon habitat, and more than 52,000 acres in New Mexico that protect wildlife corridors while preventing incompatible development. More recent projects include tens of thousands of acres of forestland in Maine, working forest and habitat lands in Michigan, and large floodplain and forest tracts in the Mississippi and Missouri River corridors, all designed to improve connectivity, water quality, and long-term land stewardship. Collectively, these projects highlight how public-private partnerships can leverage private capital to complement public conservation priorities—protecting vast acreages, sustaining working lands, expanding public access, and ensuring conservation outcomes that neither sector could achieve alone.

Conclusion

As the nation approaches its 250th anniversary, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation remains focused on the long view—how today's decisions shape the landscapes, communities, and wildlife Americans will inherit in the next century and beyond. Since 1984, NFWF has been dedicated to sustaining, restoring, and enhancing the nation's fish, wildlife, plants, and habitats through voluntary, locally driven conservation grounded in strong public-private partnerships.

I hope the examples shared today demonstrate how Congress's continued support for public-private partnerships can empower more communities to engage in conservation on both public and private lands and use the semi quincentennial not only as a moment of celebration, but as a catalyst for renewed stewardship. At NFWF, we believe Americans across the country want to protect fish and wildlife and improve the places where they live, work, and recreate. Our role is to help remove barriers, leverage resources, and ensure conservation succeeds. Congress's leadership is essential to scaling these efforts, and I appreciate the opportunity to share how NFWF helps translate that leadership into durable, on-the-ground results. Thank you.