

**STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, INTERIOR SUBCOMMITTEE,
REGARDING THE FISCAL YEAR 2015 BUDGET
APRIL 3, 2014**

Good morning Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Moran, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Fiscal Year 2015 budget request, and for the subcommittee's continued support of the Service's work.

As Americans, we want to protect our land, water and wildlife for our children and grandchildren, and provide places where citizens of all ages can enjoy and appreciate the outdoors. We want future generations to be able to go hunting, fishing, biking, camping, boating and to view wildlife. We want to pass on a sense of sportsmanship. We also want to preserve the benefits that nature can provide, such as clean water, pollinators to ensure our food supply, native plants to prevent erosion and control wildfires, and wetlands to reduce storm damage to coastal areas.

At the same time we recognize that life is about balance. We need the outdoors, but we also need places to work and live, we need places to shop and to make the products that we depend on.

The Service recognizes this balance, and is engaged in the pursuit of conservation for a growing economy and a growing population. We have proposed a budget that is strategically crafted to help us with this task.

The President's Fiscal Year 2015 discretionary budget request for the Service is designed to build on our national heritage of the outdoors, and construct solutions to tomorrow's challenges. It makes strategic investments to promote economic growth while conserving wildlife and their habitat. We support traditional values of sportsmanship and traditional ways of life on working landscapes. By doing so, we will also sustain the jobs and economic growth that these resources support,

while improving air and water quality and providing many other vital benefits for people across the nation.

The President's request supports \$1.5 billion in programs for the Service, an increase of \$48.8 million over the 2014 enacted level to fund the agency's high priority needs. The budget also anticipates at least \$1.3 billion will be available under permanent appropriations, most of which will be provided directly to States to support fish and wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation.

I'd like to take some time to highlight some of our key conservation priorities and explain how this budget request supports them.

Wildlife Trafficking

Wildlife trafficking has become a global crisis, imperiling both fragile ecosystems and regional security and stability. Decades of international efforts to protect and restore wildlife populations are at risk, as rising affluence in Asia and other parts of the world fuels increasing demand for wildlife products and drives prices steadily upward. The poaching of African elephants for ivory and rhinos for their horns has reached unprecedented levels in the modern era, and illegal trade is undermining the conservation of scores of other species. Elephant massacres have taken place in Chad, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic in the past year. Well-armed and organized criminal enterprises have taken advantage of insufficient protection in remote areas, destabilizing governments in several nations. We're rapidly reaching a tipping point, beyond which there is clear and substantial danger that not just elephants, but rhinos, tigers and other iconic species will vanish from the wild.

The United States leadership is vital to this struggle, as demonstrated by recent events. Since we crushed the United States' stock of seized illegal ivory last year, China and France have followed suit and destroyed illegal ivory. Hong Kong has also announced its intention to do so. The Service is requesting \$3.0 million in increases for its Law Enforcement and International Affairs programs as part of the Administration's new National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking. This strategy leverages resources and expertise across the federal government to crack

down on poaching and trafficking of hundreds of species. The Service will lead the strategy's implementation with the Departments of Justice and State, building on the foundation laid by the Service through decades of international conservation and law enforcement work.

Refuge System

The National Wildlife Refuge System, for which \$476.4 million is requested, an increase of \$4.2 million, is the cornerstone of the Service's efforts to conserve fish, wildlife and plants at a landscape scale. While every unit of the system provides important habitat for wildlife, they can also be a catalyst for larger, voluntary efforts to conserve important habitat on surrounding public and private lands. By working with partners, we can leverage available resources to benefit wildlife and keep working families on the land they've stewarded for generations. By using science to identify the right species and prioritizing the actions on the landscape that will have the greatest benefit for those species, we can provide greater benefits to a host of additional species, while providing clean air, water and other benefits to local communities. Rather than conserving species on a thousand isolated plots, we can work together to restore and protect larger blocks of connected habitat.

The newest units of the Refuge System reflect these priorities, representing locally-supported, partnership driven conservation efforts that respect and recognize the contributions of private landowners in conserving wildlife habitat at a landscape scale. The 2015 budget includes \$168.8 million for land acquisition for these important natural areas, funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This includes \$55.0 million in current funding and \$113.8 million in proposed permanent funding, an overall increase of \$114.4 million above the 2014 enacted level. Funding would help acquire important natural areas in the California desert, the Dakota tallgrass prairie, Florida/Georgia Longleaf pine, and the Rappahanock, Silvio Conte and Bear River National Wildlife Refuges.

Expanded Outdoor Recreation Opportunities – While the Refuge System's benefits to wildlife are measured in many ways, refuges also play crucial roles in local communities across the Nation. By protecting wetlands, grasslands, forests, wilderness and other habitats, wildlife refuges improve air and water quality,

relieve flooding, improve soil quality and trap greenhouse gases. They are also major drivers of economic growth, especially in rural communities. Our latest survey indicates that yearly expenditures related to hunting, fishing and wildlife-related recreation are approximately \$145 billion. And our recent updated study “Banking on Nature” found that national wildlife refuges welcome 46.5 million visitors, create 35,000 jobs, and generate \$2.4 billion in sales and economic output each year. Wildlife refuges are a sound investment: for every \$1.00 Congress provides in funding for the Refuge System, nearly \$5.00 is generated in local economies.

This information highlights the importance of expanding our efforts to help Americans experience their wildlife refuges. We’re committed to expanding hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation opportunities across the Refuge System, wherever it’s feasible and compatible with the mission and purposes of the refuge. More than 335 wildlife refuges now offer hunting opportunities, and more than 370 of the Refuge System’s 562 refuges provide fishing opportunities. We recently announced new hunting programs on six refuges and the expansion of existing hunting and fishing programs on 20 refuges. We’re also modifying existing regulations governing about 75 more refuges and Wildlife Management Districts, in order to provide new hunting and fishing opportunities. The President’s budget request includes an increase of \$649,000 for Refuge Law Enforcement for communication equipment to improve resource and visitor protection and support these expanded opportunities.

Engaging the Next Generation – As urbanization accelerates; many Americans find it increasingly difficult to experience nature. This has profound implications for the health and well-being of millions of people, especially our Nation’s youth. It also has profound implications for conservation in the future. Research shows that people who view nature as an abstraction are much less likely to understand and support conservation than those who have personally experienced the outdoors. And studies are finding that children who spend more time active in nature are physically healthier, cognitively more advanced, and suffer fewer emotional problems than children who aren’t afforded those opportunities. At least one wildlife refuge is within an hour’s drive of most major cities and more than 260 wildlife refuges are near smaller cities.

As a critical component of Secretary Jewell’s strategy for youth engagement, the Service’s budget includes \$13.5 million for youth programs. Within this request is a \$2.5 million increase for the Urban Wildlife Refuges Partnership, which will invite city dwellers to enjoy outdoor adventures by creating “stepping stones of engagement” to allow new audiences to connect easily with the outdoors. The Refuge System designated “Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships” in eight demographically and geographically varied cities in 2013. These partnerships will bring diverse organizations together to expand opportunities for urban families to experience the natural world. Additional partnerships will be established this year, supported by the President’s budget request. Through this effort, the Service will partner with local communities and educational organizations, such as minority-serving colleges and universities, to offer opportunities for youth to explore science, technology, engineering and math careers by volunteering to support programs at urban wildlife refuges.

Improving our Understanding

In order to deliver the most effective and efficient conservation, our work must be focused on explicit, measureable conservation objectives that provide the greatest benefits to the broadest spectrum of species and habitats. This requires access to the best available scientific and technical information to provide our workforce with the tools to inform conservation decisions and actions. We will continue to support and develop shared science capabilities with our partners in national networks of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and Climate Science Centers to understand and help manage for change on the landscape. These partnerships help advance our collective understanding of what is happening on the landscape, and provide a forum for partners to align their conservation work with that of other agencies and organizations to maximize its impact.

Our budget requests an increase of \$14.4 million for science-related activities. This funding will underwrite research designed to answer important questions, including how to better address White Nose Syndrome to help save endangered bats; whether barred owl removal improves conditions for spotted owls; and how to minimize effects of energy development and transmission projects on bald and

golden eagles, bats, and other species. The increase will also help us answer questions about changes in freshwater availability with shifts in precipitation patterns and the spread of wildlife diseases and invasive species.

Powering Our Future

The development of diversified energy sources, from renewable sources as well as fossil fuels, is a fundamental part of our nation's energy strategy. However, if placed at the wrong locations or designed improperly, energy projects can have significant negative impacts on fish, wildlife and their habitats. We continue to focus on landscape-level planning that anticipates and reduces impacts to migratory birds, bats and imperiled species at a population level, while giving us the ability to review projects faster and with more flexibility. The budget proposes \$16.7 million, an increase of \$2.5 million, for activities associated with energy development, including a program increase of \$1.1 million for the Ecological Services Planning and Consultation program to support review of renewable energy projects. An increase of \$1.4 million is proposed to analyze potential impacts of energy transmission in the American West and to identify strategies to mitigate negative impacts. The budget maintains funding for migratory bird conservation to help address the impact of development, particularly wind energy projects, on wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Cooperative Recovery – Approximately 380 species listed as threatened or endangered are found in or around units of the Refuge System. We cannot address the needs of these species without working cooperatively with our partners beyond refuge boundaries. Our Cooperative Recovery Initiative funds select proposals and leverages the resources of multiple Service programs to implement recovery actions for species near delisting, reclassification from endangered to threatened, and actions that are urgently needed for critically endangered species. Projects funded in 2013 focused on implementing recovery actions for 44 listed plant and animal species. This funding generates significant outcomes. For example, we proposed delisting for the Oregon chub last month due to efforts undertaken with

this funding. In FY 2015, the Service requests a total of \$7.7 million, an increase of \$1.8 million over the 2014 enacted level, for cooperative recovery. This increase will support this cross-programmatic partnership approach for planning, restoration, and management actions to recover species on and around National Wildlife Refuges.

Greater Sage Grouse – The Service has a legal obligation to determine whether to propose listing the greater sage grouse as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by September 30, 2015. Our priority is always to cooperatively address the needs of imperiled species before they require the protection of the ESA. Federal and State land managers within the range of the greater sage grouse are engaged in an unprecedented level of conservation planning and delivery in an effort to improve the status of the species and reduce the threats in order to avoid the need for a listing. The budget requests a \$4.0 million increase to support conservation of the greater sage grouse across 11 western States. This increase will allow the Service to help Federal, State, and private parties to design, implement, and align conservation efforts to ensure they collectively meet the range-wide needs of the species. It will also help us to develop the scientific tools and information needed to inform our listing determination. Our partners are working to enroll significant numbers of landowners across the range of the greater sage grouse in candidate conservation agreements with assurances. Doing so requires a large staff investment by the Service to provide technical expertise to landowners considering enrollment. Conservation of greater sage grouse and its habitat will also support conservation of dozens of other species that share this landscape, while helping ensure the future of ranching and a developing energy economy central to western working landscapes.

Supporting the economic recovery - The Nation's economic recovery is bringing growth in business investment and consumer spending, which will increase demand for infrastructure, housing, and commercial construction. These new projects will bring more requests for Federal permits that certify compliance with environmental laws. Economic recovery also generates demand for supporting infrastructure such as roads, water supply control and flood protection. To support this predicted growth, the Service requests an increase of \$18.5 million to expand

the Service's capacity to provide timely technical assistance and environmental reviews. The increased funding will support water conservation in the San Francisco Bay and San Joaquin River delta, implementation of species recovery actions, and environmental contaminant analyses. The budget also includes funding to support delisting actions for recovered species thereby returning management responsibilities to State wildlife agencies – and by downlisting species that no longer meet the definition of endangered to provide additional management flexibility where warranted.

Fish and Aquatic Conservation

The budget includes \$48.6 million, an increase of \$2.1 million above the 2014 enacted level, for operations of the National Fish Hatchery System. The budget also includes an increase of \$4.4 million to allow the Service to focus on limiting the spread of invasive Asian carp in major watersheds that are highly likely to have habitat suitable for self-sustaining populations, such as the Great Lakes, and the Missouri, Ohio, and upper Mississippi Rivers.

At requested funding level for hatcheries, the Service will maintain all high priority and mitigation fish propagation programs. Funding is not sufficient to continue all other propagation programs at current levels, so the Service will need to adjust propagation programs and make modest reductions to some operations, in consultation with partners, to bring expenditures in line with available funding. Our decisions will be informed by input based on a comprehensive review of the Service's 70 active propagation hatcheries conducted in 2012 by a team of Service experts from across the country. The Service is using this report to engage partners and stakeholders, including State fish and wildlife agencies, Tribes, and local non-profits, in a discussion on major findings and recommendations. We will consider this input along with anticipated operating costs for existing propagation programs, the Report's findings and recommendations, and other factors to determine next steps. We will keep you informed as we work through this process.

Grant Programs

Meanwhile, the budget requests \$87.8 million for grant programs administered by

the Service that support America's Great Outdoors goals. This includes a request of \$50.0 million for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants. These grants provide important funding for aiding and improving our Nation's sensitive and imperiled species, and we continue to support our State fish and wildlife agencies in implementing these efforts. The budget request for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund is \$34.1 million, equal to the 2014 level. Likewise, the request for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Grant Program is \$3.7 million, equal to the 2014 enacted level.

Legislative Proposals

The budget contains several legislative proposals that will advance conservation across the country.

Restoring the Purchasing Power of the Duck Stamp – Wetland landscapes, and the habitat they provide for waterfowl and other native species, are at risk across the country, as rising commodity prices fuel both increasing land prices and the conversion of small wetlands for crop production. This is especially true in the “Duck Factory” of the Prairie Pothole Region. The Federal Duck Stamp Program provides vital funding for land acquisition and protection in this region - the cradle of North America's waterfowl breeding habitat - and in other breeding, resting and wintering habitat nationwide. But the price of the Duck Stamp hasn't increased in more than two decades, and our ability to protect vital habitat continues to decline. The President's budget asks Congress to approve a much overdue increase in the price of the stamp. Raising the price of the stamp from \$15 to \$25 would enable us to protect an estimated 17,000 additional acres of waterfowl habitat every year.

This increase in the price of the Duck Stamp is needed to restore its purchasing power. The cost of the Duck Stamp has remained the same since 1991. The stamp would need to cost about \$25 today to have the same buying power that \$15 had in 1991. For example, in 1991, revenue from the Duck Stamp acquired 89,000 acres of habitat for the Refuge System at an average cost of \$306 an acre. In 2010, the Service was able to acquire significantly less habitat because land values had tripled to an average of \$1,091 an acre. Conserving waterfowl habitat makes good economic sense. Hunting, fishing and other wildlife-related activities provide

\$145 billion in economic activity each year. Increasing the price of the Duck Stamp is critical to ensuring migratory waterfowl populations thrive in the future and for maintaining our hunting tradition, a linchpin for the economies of many states.

Protecting the Nation's Wildlife Refuge Resources – The budget includes appropriations language to provide authority to recover compensation from responsible parties who injure or destroy Refuge resources. This authority is similar to that of the National Park Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and relieves the taxpayers from covering these losses. Currently, when someone runs a car into a building, spills toxic chemicals, vandalizes assets, or causes similar damage on a wildlife refuge, the Service is not able to seek compensation from the responsible party to repair or replace damaged resources. Instead the Service must go through an onerous process that may generate a fine that is sent to the general Treasury. This proposal will insure that natural resources will be available for future generations and requires that persons responsible for harm -- not taxpayers -- pay for any injury they cause.

Certification of Non-Toxic Shot – In addition, the Service is requesting authority to retain and utilize fees that are assessed for regulatory reviews of non-toxic shot used to hunt migratory birds.

Conclusion

We are at a pivotal time in history for ensuring conservation of fish and wildlife and plants while balancing the needs of communities across the Nation. The actions we take now will have repercussions for generations of Americans to follow. The native species and ecosystems of our planet support billions of people and help drive the world's economy. Despite the challenges we face, I am incredibly optimistic about the future. With the President's budget request we can help preserve the values Americans support, leave a legacy to our children and grandchildren, and sustain species and habitat. Thank you for your work on behalf of the American people, and for your support of the Fish and Wildlife Service. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.