

Written Statement of Brad Brooks
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before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Regarding the FY 2013 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill
March 21, 2012

The Wilderness Society (TWS) represents more than 500,000 members and supporters who share our mission to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places. We thank the subcommittee for the opportunity to submit comments on the Fiscal Year 2013 Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

We understand that tough budgetary decisions will need to be made in upcoming years, however, when deciding on funding that affects hundreds of millions of Americans, we must take into account the full economic, social, environmental and cultural value of the many programs managed by this subcommittee. The Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill supports millions of jobs, improves our infrastructure, encourages economic investment in local communities, keeps our air breathable, our water clean and our wildlife and outdoor spaces protected, and in many ways makes our country unique and prosperous.

Visitation to our public lands represents a hugely critical part of part of regional economies across the nation. Spending by forest, refuge, park, and BLM land visitors alone is over \$40 billion annually and sustains nearly 1 million full and part time jobs. In addition, conservation programs are pivotal to the success of the outdoor recreation industry, which contributes \$730 billion annually to the economy while supporting nearly 6.5 million jobs across the country.

To invest in these critical programs that provide jobs, and protect the health and economic well being of local communities, we urge bold, immediate action in support of conservation funding for Fiscal Year 2013. Specifically, TWS recommends:

Land and Water Conservation Fund

LWCF remains the premier federal program to conserve our nation's land, water, historic, and recreation heritage. It is a critical tool to acquire inholdings, expand public lands, and protect national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, wild and scenic river corridors, national scenic and historic trails, the Bureau of Land Management lands, and other federal areas. The companion LWCF state grants program provides crucial support for state and local park acquisitions, recreational facilities, and trail corridors. LWCF also funds two other important state grant programs – the Forest Legacy Program and Cooperative Endangered Species programs – that ensure permanent conservation of important forest lands and threatened and endangered species' habitat.

- *TWS supports funding LWCF at the proposed \$450 million, a level which will support the program in continuing to assist land management agencies manage the public lands more efficiently and cost-effectively. This is achieved through strategic inholdings acquisition which reduces internal boundary line surveying, as well as right-of-way conflicts and special use permits. Also, LWCF investments in important wildlife and recreational habitat ensure*

that public lands stay public for hunters, anglers, and other outdoor recreationists for generations to come.

BLM Onshore Oil and Gas Policy

The BLM is implementing important management reforms of its oil and gas program that should lead to a better balance between oil and gas development on public lands, and the protection of the many natural resource values that were put at risk by previous policies. The Administration has proposed the following reforms of the BLM's oil and gas program, which *TWS supports*:

- *A fee on onshore federal operators designed to bring in \$10 million per year for the I & E program*
- *Continuation of the \$6,500 APD fee first approved by Congress for FY 10*
- *A \$4.00 per acre fee on non-producing onshore leases*
- *Repeal of Sec. 365 of EPACT which diverted lease rental revenues to fund the "Permit Streamlining Pilot Offices", and prohibited the BLM from charging APD fees (the latter provision in effect overridden by Congress in the FY 10 appropriations bill)*
- *Initiation of a new rule to raise royalty rates for federal onshore oil and gas leases, with a goal of raising oil and gas revenues by \$1 billion over ten years (royalty rates under consideration are not discussed in the budget proposal, however)*

BLM Rapid Ecological Assessments

TWS supports completion of the BLM's initiative to develop Rapid Ecological Assessments. Once completed, these assessments will be of vital importance in assuring the BLM makes appropriate management decisions in conformance with its multiple-use mandate.

BLM Wilderness

The budget proposal of \$18.568 million for wilderness management in the BLM is a strong proposal, but is still 6% lower than the FY '11 enacted level, the funding level necessary to ensure resource and visitor safety in the 221 wilderness areas managed by the BLM.

- *TWS urges Congress to support at least the \$18.568 million in the FY13 budget.*

BLM's National Landscape Conservation System

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) National Landscape Conservation System (Conservation Lands) comprises some 27 million acres of congressionally and presidentially designated lands and waters, including National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness, National Scenic and Historic Trails, and Wild and Scenic Rivers. Stewardship of the Conservation Lands' many units provides jobs for thousands of Americans while supporting vibrant and sustainable economies in surrounding communities. The Conservation Lands provide immeasurable public values from modest investments: outstanding recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, clean water, wilderness, and open space near cities. We ask Congress to:

- *Support the Administration's FY 2013 proposal of \$69.5 million to ensure the natural, cultural, and historical resource protection provided by the Conservation Lands for the American public.*
- *Restore the Challenge Cost Share Program at full funding of \$19 million. This is a cross-cutting program within DOI, which provides a 1:1 match for volunteer activities.*

Renewable Energy

TWS is a strong proponent of transitioning our country to a sustainable energy economy by developing our renewable energy resources quickly and responsibly. We believe renewable energy is an appropriate use of the public lands when sited in areas screened for habitat, resource, or cultural conflicts. With the resources requested in the FY 2013 budget, TWS hopes the Department will continue to work to meet and exceed the President's goal of siting over 10 gigawatts of renewable energy on public lands by the end of this year through expedient environmental review, suitability screening, and energy zone identification to find suitable places for needed renewable energy projects. In particular, TWS urges Congress to:

- *Support the request for a \$15.3 million increase for renewable energy programs across Interior from FY 12 enacted, bringing the FY 13 request to \$86.5 million.*
- *Support the Department's request to fund BLM's renewable energy activity at \$26.8 million, a \$7.1 million increase from FY 12 enacted.*
- *Support the proposed increase of \$3.7 million for the Fish and Wildlife Service to review and permit renewable energy projects.*

National Wildlife Refuge System Funding

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's finest network of protected lands and waters. Designed to conserve our fish and wildlife resources, refuges are located in every state and territory and provide enormous economic benefit for their local communities. Every year, the System attracts 45 million tourists, hunters, fishermen, and other recreationists, generating \$1.7 billion in sales, sustaining nearly 27,000 jobs annually, and contributing over \$185 million in tax revenue. The Refuge System has been under increasing fiscal strain, however, with an operations and maintenance backlog of over \$3 billion.

- *We urge Congress to support the Refuge System by approving funding at the President's recommendation of \$494.8 million.*

National Forest Restoration

TWS appreciates recent efforts to shift forest management priorities towards restoration. Programs like Legacy Roads and Trails and Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration are key to ensuring restoration efforts are successful and Congress should continue to prioritize funding for these programs. For the past four years, the Legacy Roads program has provided an essential source of funding to simultaneously restore healthy watersheds and improve recreational access in the national forests by focusing on roads and trails where lack of maintenance threatens water quality and aquatic species. The success and broad bipartisan support for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration program speaks for itself. We also look forward to the results of the 3-region test pilot for Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR). However, we do not recommend that the IRR pilot program be expanded until the test regions have had several years to prove that IRR can create improved restoration outcomes without a loss of program transparency and accountability. To achieve forest restoration goals in FY 13, TWS recommends that Congress:

- *Fully fund the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program at \$40 million;*
- *Partially restore Legacy Roads and Trails funding by providing \$75 million.*
- *Continue the Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) as a 3-region pilot program, and work closely with the Forest Service and stakeholders to ensure transparency and accountability for the activities and outcomes of the pilot program.*

National Forest Wilderness and Recreation

America's National Wilderness Preservation System is an international model for land conservation. Yet our wilderness areas are suffering from a lack of funding. Trail maintenance, law enforcement, monitoring, and user education are all significantly underfunded, leading to an erosion of wilderness values and a diminution of the experience for wilderness visitors. Without adequate resources, our wilderness areas and the recreation opportunities they provide will continue to suffer. In order to stretch limited dollars in the face of growing needs, the Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness program has grown increasingly reliant on partnerships to accomplish work. While beneficial in terms of leveraging funds and community outreach, this has the side effect of making the program particularly vulnerable to budget cuts.

- *We urge Congress to support wilderness and recreation by retaining FY12 funding levels of \$281.2 million for the Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness Program.*

National Forest Trails

The Forest Service trails system serves Americans with over 50 million visitor days of cross-country skiing, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, and off-road vehicle use each year. The National Forest System is responsible for 153,000 miles of trails, but only 21 percent are currently maintained to standard. The trail maintenance backlog had reached \$296 million as of FY 2010, and the backlog continues to grow despite the fact that the trails program leverages thousands of hours of trail work from volunteers and youth organizations each year. The miles of trails have grown 56.9% since 1977 to accommodate the 376% growth in annual visitor-days on the trail system. However, the trails maintenance and reconstruction budget line item has remained flat since the 1980 increasing only 1.75% after adjusting for inflation. In addition, the lack of sufficient funds to maintain trails to standard continues to leave trails closed or unsafe for visitors, and creates avoidable environmental degradation that is costly to undo. Despite these tremendous and growing needs, in FY12 the trails budget was cut 4% to \$81.982 million.

- *The FY13 President's Budget proposes a negligible increase to \$81.985 million, and we strongly recommend Congress support at least that level of funding, but consider increasing it in light of the direct impact this program has on millions of Americans' recreational experiences.*

Council on Environmental Quality

CEQ serves as the principal environmental policy advisor to the President. CEQ has broad statutory responsibilities for advising the President in the development of environmental policies and legislation; assessing and reporting trends in environmental quality and recommending appropriate response strategies; and overseeing implementation of NEPA. Additionally, CEQ has a lead role in facilitating the development and permitting of utility-scale renewable energy projects – projects which will reduce foreign energy dependence and create jobs. CEQ's staff ranged from 50-70 in the 1970s and '80s, but it is currently staffed by only 24 FTEs.

- *Additional resources will enhance CEQ's ability to continue its mission of protecting the public health, safety, and environmental quality of our communities by implementing our Nation's environmental policies.*

Landscape Level Science and Conservation

TWS supports the budget request for funding Cooperative Landscape Conservation and Adaptive Science at \$33.1 million, an increase of \$856,000. This funding supports the operations of 14 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives.