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**Statement of The Nature Conservancy
Fiscal Year 2013 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives
March 21, 2012**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Nature Conservancy's recommendations for Fiscal Year 2013 appropriations. My name is Christy Plumer and I am the Director of Federal Land Programs for the Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy is an international, non-profit conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. Our mission is to conserve the lands and waters upon which all life depends.

As we enter the FY2013 Budget cycle and another year of this challenging fiscal environment, the Conservancy continues to recognize the need for fiscal austerity. The Conservancy also wishes to thank this Subcommittee for the final FY2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act funding levels for Department of Interior and U.S. Forest Service conservation programs. As this Subcommittee begins to tackle another difficult budget cycle, the Conservancy stresses our concerns that the wildlife and land conservation programs should not shoulder a disproportionate share of cuts in this budget. Our budget recommendations this year do not exceed the President's budget request except for a few instances in which we recommend FY2012 funding levels. Moreover, as a science-based and business-oriented organization, we believe strongly that the budget levels we support represent a prudent investment in our country's future that will reduce risks and ultimately save money based on the tangible economic, recreation and societal benefits natural resources provide each year to the American people. We look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, as you address the ongoing needs for conservation investments to sustain our nation's heritage of natural resources that are also important to the economic vitality of communities across this country.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The Conservancy supports the President's FY2013 Budget request of \$450 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund with the aim of continuing to work toward full funding for the program. The President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative is the prominent focus of this annual LWCF Budget, and includes several top priority landscape conservation areas for the Conservancy including the Rocky Mountain Front/Crown of the Continent (MT/WY/ID) and Longleaf Pine Conservation Area (FL/GA/SC). This year, the Conservancy is specifically supporting 18 biologically rich land acquisition projects totaling \$94.122 million. Some of our priorities include the continuing phased acquisition of the Montana Legacy Project, Florida's northern refuges (St. Marks and St. Vincent's), Silvio O. Conte NFWR within a four state integrated landscape, and Francis Marion NF in South Carolina. We are also pleased to support the Administration's proposals for investing in conservation easements on the working ranches of FL's Everglades Headwaters NWR & Conservation Area, KS's Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area, ND and SD's Dakota Grasslands Conservation Area, and MT's Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area. All of these projects exemplify landscape scale conservation through the cost effective means of conservation easements.

Forest Legacy. We support \$60 million for this program, and specifically 3 projects – Pascagoula River Conservation Lands, Carter Mountain Working Forest Conservation Easement, and Discover Woods – totaling \$7.41 million. We hope this year to complete the acquisition of these important lands that will provide recovery for wildlife habitat and rare species, public recreational access for hunting and fishing, and outdoor experiences for financially disadvantaged children and those with special needs.

Endangered Species. The Conservancy enthusiastically supports \$60 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (CESCF). The Conservancy and its partners have used the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Recovery Land Acquisition Programs to conserve key habitat for numerous threatened, endangered and at-risk species and, thus, to help avoid conflicts over ESA issues. It has been an important catalyst for several local government-led HCPs that facilitate urban development and streamline permitting of essential transportation and energy infrastructure. In one part of Riverside County, CA, a single HCP has facilitated development of transportation infrastructure that alleviates congestion and creates jobs in this rapidly growing area. The plan facilitates development on over 700,000 acres through acquisition of 153,000 acres in new conservation lands. We also support continued endangered species funding for the Table Rocks Area, OR, to protect critical habitat for the threatened vernal pool fairy shrimp, and funding for the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program, recovery funds for the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program, and fish hatchery needs associated with the recovery plans in this region.

Climate Change. Fish, wildlife, and their habitats are and will continue to be profoundly impacted by climate change, regardless of our successes in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. If we are to get out ahead of such change to avoid disastrous losses in critical habitat and the species that depend on that habitat, we must develop the place-based science to make informed, cost-effective management investments. The Conservancy appreciates the President's commitment to respond to the global climate challenge, and this Committee's sustained leadership in supporting cooperative, science-based programs to respond to the global climate challenge help ensure resilient land and seascapes. In particular, we welcome this Committee's ongoing commitment to both the USGS-led Climate Science Centers as well as DOI's Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, and efforts to ensure integration and coordination of these initiatives with existing efforts such as the Joint Ventures and National Fish Habitat Partnerships.

National Wildlife Refuge System. The Conservancy supports the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement Coalition's request of \$495 million for Refuge System O&M. This is the President's request and represents the funding necessary to maintain management capabilities for the Refuge System in FY13. It is an \$8.3 million increase and takes into account the freeze on federal salaries.

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration. We appreciate the Committee's support for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) and demonstration of collaboratively-developed forest restoration plans at a large scale. We recommend FY12 funding be sustained for CFLR with \$40 million to restore large forest landscapes, provide jobs that sustain rural economies, reduce the risk of damaging wildfire, address invasive species, improve wildlife habitat and decommission unused, damaging roads. We are monitoring many CFLR projects closely and are very encouraged by progress to date. We also recommend reauthorization of stewardship contracting, a vital tool for forest landscape restoration.

Wildland Fire Management. We appreciate the Committee's ongoing support for the Hazardous Fuels Reduction to remove overgrown brush and trees through a variety of methods, leaving the forest in a more natural condition that is resilient to wildfires. We believe it is essential to keep at least level funding for this program. Funding reductions will result in greater, more damaging wildfires and larger federal and state outlays for emergency wildfire suppression, with more damage to life, property, and natural resources. We note that fuels reduction also creates jobs: for every \$1 million invested, approximately 16 full-time equivalent jobs are created or maintained, along with more than half a million in wages and over \$2 million in overall economic activity. We urge you to repeat your instructions in the FY2012 conference report regarding allocation of hazardous fuels funding. Community protection is a vital goal of the hazardous fuels program and strategic treatment of natural wildland areas that supply water, wood, recreation, and wildlife habitat protects communities and the resources citizens are also essential. We note that the President's Budget for FY13 has a disturbing focus on protecting structures at the expense of wildland natural areas. Significant progress to protect communities and natural areas has been achieved since 2001 with a roughly equal allocation of funding between the wildland urban interface and wildlands. Shifting too much funding away from wildlands will forestall treatments in strategic forest locations where treatments may prevent mega-fires, and will allow fuels to regrow on acres already treated that need maintenance with controlled burns. We recommend \$317 million for Hazardous Fuels Reduction in the Forest Service budget, with \$76 million for wildland and \$241 million for wildland urban interface, and \$183 million for Hazardous Fuels Reduction in the Department of the Interior budget, with at least 25% allocated for treatment of wildlands necessary to achieve the conservation missions of the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management.

Integrated Resource Restoration. We appreciate the Committee's work to create an Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) pilot in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012, allowing Forest Service Regions (Northern, Intermountain, and Southwestern) to test the integrated budget approach. The Conservancy has actively followed implementation of the pilot in the 3 regions and expects an increase in restoration outcomes to result. The Conservancy believes it is premature to take this pilot national, so we support continuation of the pilot for a second year. Important lessons will be learned from the pilot and this information is necessary if full implementation of IRR is to succeed.

Watershed Protection, Cooperative State Fire Assistance and Landscape Scale Restoration. Forest health problems and fire management are most effectively and efficiently addressed at large scales. The Nature Conservancy recommends support for watershed restoration and leveraging state funding to address wildfire risks and begin cooperative Landscape Scale Restoration. Our recommendations include funding at the FY12 enacted levels for Legacy Road and Trail Remediation, with \$45 million for the National Forest System, \$86 million for State Fire Assistance and \$18 million for the new Landscape Scale Restoration program, to coordinate cost-effective investment in fuels treatments.

Forest Health Management. America's forests are threatened by a growing number of non-native pests and diseases. The Conservancy asks the Committee to maintain funding at the FY2012 enacted level, which totals \$112 million. This funding is necessary to address effectively the most economically and ecologically damaging pests, including the Asian Longhorned Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, Sudden Oak Death, thousand-canker disease of walnut, and the goldspotted oak borer.

Forest Service Research Program. We support the President's request for the Forest Service Research program to maintain funding of research to improve detection and control methods for the Emerald Ash Borer, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, goldspotted oak borer, thousand cankers disease, and other non-native forest pests and diseases.

State Wildlife Grants. The Conservancy endorses the Teaming with Wildlife Coalition's support for robust funding for this important program. Strong federal investments are essential to ensure strategic actions are undertaken by state and federal agencies and the conservation community to conserve wildlife populations and their habitats. We also support the Administration's request to maintain the current program match requirement of 65:35 to help fiscally-impacted states.

Migratory Bird, Joint Ventures and Fish Habitat Partnership Programs. The Committee has consistently provided vitally important investments for a number of migratory bird programs. Such investments are essential to reverse declines in bird populations through direct conservation action, monitoring and science. We urge the Committee to fund the President's request for such established and successful programs as NAWCA and the Joint Ventures, and the Migratory Bird Management Program. We support the President's request for the FWS Coastal Program and Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and request strong funding this year for the National Fish Habitat Initiative, particularly in light of the recent Memorandum of Understanding announced between the Secretaries of Interior, Commerce and Agriculture in support of the Initiative.

International Programs. There are large unmet needs for international conservation. When well-managed, international conservation contributes much to human welfare in the developing countries and globally. Recognizing the current fiscal situation requires a measure of austerity, we support the President's FY13 request for the FWS' Multinational Species Conservation Funds, the international wildlife trade programs, and Wildlife Without Borders. These programs have already been cut and are currently below the FY10 enacted levels; further cuts would be very damaging. We also support a line item and funding for the U.S. Forest Service's International Programs at its FY12 enacted level of \$8 million.

Environmental Protection Agency. TNC acknowledges that reductions in EPA's budget are necessary to support national deficit reduction. We believe the overall President's Budget request of \$8.34 B for EPA, which represents a \$105 M decrease from the FY12 enacted amount, is appropriate. However, Congress should remain mindful of the relatively small size of EPA's discretionary budget as it considers where additional budget cuts should occur government-wide. Congress should avoid disproportionate cuts to EPA's ecosystem-oriented water programs because those programs have such wide-reaching and beneficial impacts throughout the country. We also continue to support the allocation of sufficient funds for innovative strategic planning programs like the Healthy Watersheds Initiative, which embraces a whole-system planning approach to water resource management. This program should be endorsed as a means to enable Federal and state programs to protect and restore freshwater habitats at large scale through more bang-for-the-buck actions.

Thank you for the opportunity to present The Nature Conservancy's recommendations for the FY2013 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.