

**TESTIMONY OF DAN ASHE, DIRECTOR,
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
INTERIOR SUBCOMMITTEE,
REGARDING THE FISCAL YEAR 2014 BUDGET OF THE
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**

April 18, 2013

Good morning Chairman Simpson, Mr. Moran, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Dan Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on the Service's Fiscal Year 2014 budget request. I would also like to thank the Subcommittee for its continued support of our mission to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Service is confronting the significant funding challenges of the FY 2013 sequester by making difficult choices to do less in certain areas while ensuring the health and safety of our workforce and the public. We have set priorities that guide our operations and allow us to continue the most essential conservation work.

Despite these challenging times and our changing American society, the Service continues to be relevant. Highlights of recent accomplishments include bringing down an international Rhino-horn smuggling ring in "Operation Crash;" expanding our historical commitment to conserving waterfowl breeding habitat in the prairie potholes; achieving voluntary conservation efforts for species like the Dune Sagebrush Lizard, lesser prairie chicken and greater sage grouse; delisting wolves in Wyoming and the Great Lakes; working as part of an integrated state-federal team to keep the invasive Asian carp out of Lake Michigan; and using science to begin a process of refocusing our work on explicit biological goals that can best represent landscape conditions and habitat needs of larger groups of species.

For FY 2014, the Service's budget request will focus funding on the agency's highest priority conservation initiatives, while containing costs through management efficiencies and other savings. The \$1.55 billion request includes program increases for our high priority needs of \$58.8 million compared to the FY 2012 enacted level. The budget also includes approximately \$1.2 billion available under permanent appropriations, most of which will be provided directly to States to support fish and wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation.

The budget proposes an increase of \$7.4 million for activities associated with renewable energy development, including \$1.5 million for the Endangered Species Consultation program to support assessments of renewable energy projects, \$2.8 million for Conservation Planning Assistance to enable the Service to participate more fully in priority landscape level planning to assist industry and State fish and wildlife agencies' siting of renewable energy projects and transmission corridor infrastructure, \$750,000 for Migratory Birds to strengthen migratory bird

conservation in areas with wind development, \$1 million for enforcement of wildlife protection laws to lessen the impact of energy development on wildlife resources, and \$1.4 million for scientific research to identify impacts from energy transmission infrastructure development in the American west and to inform mitigation strategies.

This budget request maintains the Service's commitment to the stewardship of America's Great Outdoors. Understanding the importance of training the next generation of conservation leaders, the Service is requesting \$15.9 million to support Youth in the Great Outdoors, including \$2.5 million for the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps to put young Americans to work protecting, restoring and enhancing public and tribal lands and waters while imparting the importance of fish and wildlife conservation.

The 2014 budget includes a total of \$190.3 million through the LWCF for land acquisitions that the Service has identified as having the greatest conservation benefits. The Administration is proposing legislative language to partially fund land acquisition with \$63.5 million in mandatory funding from the LWCF in 2014. Cross-bureau conservation focus areas for FY 2014 include the Southwest Desert, Crown of the Continent and Longleaf Pine landscapes and National Trails.

Funding is also included to support the Administration's National Blueways System. Through this cooperative watershed management program, the Service will lead the collaborative efforts with the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation and the National Park Service to form new watershed partnerships, expand existing watershed partnerships, and conduct projects using a "headwaters to mouth" approach.

Human demands on the environment combined with environmental stressors are creating an urgent need for conservation choices. The scale of issues and challenges we face is unprecedented and no single entity has the resources necessary to address these challenges on its own. Only through cooperative efforts can the Service successfully recover our Nation's most imperiled species-endangered, threatened, and candidate wildlife and plants. To promote this concept throughout the Service and with our partners, the FY 2014 budget request includes \$9.4 million for the Cooperative Recovery initiative, which we began in 2013, where Service programs work together to focus recovery actions for listed species on National Wildlife Refuges and surrounding ecosystems.

Sound science is a critical component of conservation. The FY 2014 budget request includes a program increase of \$11.8 million to support applied science directed at high impact questions surrounding threats to fish and wildlife resources. This funding will provide the answers needed to manage species to healthy, sustainable, desired levels. This includes an increase of \$1.5 million for white-nose syndrome. Additional science funding increases include \$1.4 million for researching impacts and identifying mitigation strategies related to energy transmission corridors in the American west, focusing on impacts to Sage grouse and Desert tortoise, \$1.0 million for biological carbon sequestration, \$500,000 for climate adaptation focusing on early detection and rapid response for invasive species, \$1.4 million for America's Great Outdoors ecosystem and landscape scale conservation on demonstration landscapes, and \$1 million for the Landscape Conservation Stewardship Program in General Operations.

The Service budget fully funds fixed costs and supports the President's Management Agenda to cut waste and implement a government that is more responsive and open. Over the last three years, the Administration has implemented a series of management reforms to curb spending in contracting, travel, information technology and other areas. The Department of the Interior is on target to reduce administrative spending by \$217 million from 2010 levels by the end of 2013, and to sustain these savings in 2014.

Cooperative Landscape Conservation

Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) will continue to act as a focal point for collaborative work with partners, to disseminate applied science products and tools for resource management decisions across landscapes. This collaboration provides partners scientific information so they can target resources and activities that will produce the greatest benefits for fish and wildlife. Within the Service, LCCs help support and augment many ongoing programs, including Endangered Species Recovery Plans, Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plans, fish passage programs and habitat restoration. In FY 2014, targeted funding will provide for continued development of critical partnerships associated with more established LCCs and the resources necessary for 16 LCCs to be fully operational, while still supporting all 22 LCCs at some level.

Refuge Inventory and Monitoring Program

In support of LCC development and adaptive science management, the requested increase of \$3 million over the FY 2012 enacted level for Refuge Inventory and Monitoring will be used to continue building the landscape scale, long-term inventory and monitoring network that the Service began in FY 2010.

National Wildlife Refuge System

Funding for the operation and maintenance of the national wildlife refuge system is requested at \$499.2 million. The request includes an increase of \$12.8 million, for National Wildlife Refuges (Refuges) operations, enabling Refuges to complete additional habitat improvement projects. The funding request for refuge operations includes \$3.2 million for the aforementioned Cooperative Recovery Initiative to address current threats to endangered species on and around wildlife refuges and \$3.8 million for the Challenge Cost Share program which funds a variety of small-scale projects with partners. An additional \$2.7 million will be used for refuge law enforcement to respond to drug production and smuggling, wildlife poaching, illegal border activity, assaults and a variety of natural resource violations and assessing radio infrastructure.

Law Enforcement

The Service budget request provides \$68.3 million for the law enforcement program to investigate wildlife crimes and enforce the laws that govern the Nation's wildlife trade. Wildlife trafficking is increasingly a transnational crime involving illicit activities in two or more countries and often two or more global regions. Cooperation between nations is essential to combat this crime. Investigations of transnational crime are inherently difficult, and they become even more so without organizational structures to facilitate this cooperation. This

request of \$6.1 million above the 2012 enacted level includes funding to foster these needed partnerships, to address technical challenges in the science of wildlife forensics, and includes \$1.0 million to bolster law enforcement activities that address the impacts of energy development and production on wildlife and their habitat.

Endangered Species

The FY 2014 budget includes \$185.4 million to administer the Endangered Species Act, an increase of \$9.5 million when compared with the 2012 enacted level. This increase includes \$1.5 million for renewable energy consultation, \$1.0 million for science for pesticide consultations, and \$1.9 million for Cooperative Recovery for endangered species recovery on National Wildlife Refuges and in surrounding ecosystems.

Fish and Aquatic Conservation

The budget request includes a total of \$140.9 million for the Fish and Aquatic Conservation program, an increase of \$5.6 million over the 2012 enacted level. Facilitating the Service's role and responsibility in promoting ecosystem health, and fisheries and aquatic resource conservation, the budget includes increases of \$5.9 million for Asian carp activities, \$1.5 million for fish passage improvements, \$1.6 million for fisheries management and restoration actions to facilitate currently authorized activities under the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement to restore high-priority stream habitats and recover listed and native fish species, as well as \$1.5 million for the Service's cross-programmatic Cooperative Recovery initiative.

Migratory Birds

The Migratory Birds program is funded at \$50.1 million, \$1.4 million below the FY 2012 enacted. The North American Wetlands Conservation Fund is funded at \$39.4 million, \$3.9 million over 2012 enacted.

International Affairs

The budget request provides the International Affairs program with \$13.5 million, an increase of \$535,000 above the 2012 enacted level. The Multinational Species Conservation Fund is funded at \$9.8 million, an increase of \$321,000 over the 2012 enacted level.

In sum, the Service's budget request focuses our resources on transforming the agency to meet the conservation challenges of the 21st century and remain relevant in a changing American society.

By building science capacity and focusing on strategic, partnership-driven landscape conservation, this budget will enable us to be more effective and efficient with the funding we receive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. I am happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have and look forward to working with you through the appropriations process.