

**TESTIMONY OF KENNETH STANSELL, DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
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BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND
OCEANS, REGARDING THE FISCAL YEAR 2009 BUDGET OF THE U.S. FISH
AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**

February 26, 2008

Good afternoon Chairwoman Bordallo, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Ken Stansell, Deputy Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you today on the Service's Fiscal Year 2009 budget request. I would also like to take this opportunity 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 2009 request for current appropriations totals \$1.3 billion, a decrease of \$64.6 million compared to 2008. The total request for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, including the permanent appropriations, is \$2.2 billion,. The permanent appropriations include over \$814.4 million that will be apportioned to the states and territories for high priority fish and wildlife conservation projects. This includes \$347.7 million through the Wildlife Restoration Program and \$466.7 million through the Sport Fish Restoration Program. These programs are often referred to as Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson or Wallop-Breaux, after the congressional sponsors of the acts that authorized these programs..

The 2009 request strategically positions the Service to maintain strong core functions essential to its mission, including priorities for the refuge system, migratory bird conservation and management, achieving recovery and pursuing initiatives for threatened and endangered species, conserving aquatic resources and connecting people with nature to ensure the future of conservation.

Approximately 86 percent of the Service's current request supports the Department's mission goal of resource protection, with remaining resources devoted to achieving resource use, recreation, and serving communities. In this year's request we are emphasizing protecting declining bird species, restoring our coastal and ocean resources, providing increased ability to manage law enforcement issues in our Southwest border areas, and continuing the healthy lands and cooperative conservation focuses of past budgets.

In order to perform this important work, the Service must continue to meet its obligations for fixed costs. Fixed costs for 2009 total \$19.8 million, of which \$16.4 million is budgeted and \$3.4 million is absorbed. The request partially funds pay and health care costs and fully funds costs paid to other agencies and the Department-wide Working Capital Fund. The fixed costs increases are for federal pay raises; employer contributions

to health benefit plans; unemployment compensation; workers compensation; GSA and non-GSA rent increases; and the Department-wide Working Capital Fund.

Birds Forever (+ \$8 million)

Last summer the National Audubon Society released its annual *State of the Birds* and the *Common Birds in Decline* reports. The reports, drawing on more than 40 years of data, document an alarming decline in some of the Nation's most treasured, and most common, bird species. These declines sound a warning about the state of our environment. Many factors lie behind these declines in wild bird populations, chief of which is the loss of habitat. Through the Department's Birds Forever Initiative, we propose to help reverse declines of wild birds.

An increase of \$8.0 million will fund joint venture partnerships, inventory and monitoring, and habitat restoration programs. From this amount, \$4.0 million will go toward Joint Ventures and will be used to support four new joint ventures: Rio Grande, Appalachian Mountains, East Gulf Coastal Plain, and Oaks and Prairies. This funding will also provide additional support to existing Joint Ventures, such as the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture. We will increase Strategic Habitat Conservation capacity by expanding habitat and species modeling, monitoring of birds and their habitats, and by using remote sensing and other resources to detect and assess net landscape change. Additional funds for the Migratory Birds Conservation and Monitoring Program will be used to implement efforts for almost 30 species currently in decline.

Under the Birds Forever initiative, the Service will continue to cooperate with the U.S. Geologic Survey to enhance our collective ability to improve wild bird populations. The USGS will provide the science that will support the development of bird conservation plans by expanding capabilities for population and habitat modeling, landscape characterization and assessment, integrated monitoring, and biological information management.

The budget also sustains the 2008 funding increase of \$35.9 million that the Congress provided to the refuge system. We appreciate your efforts to fund the refuge system. These funds will continue to contribute to the conservation and protection of migratory bird habitat in 2008 and 2009, including the improvement of over 200,000 acres of refuge bird habitat. The budget also includes an increase of \$666,000 for the North American Wetlands Conservation Grant Fund for additional grants for migratory bird-related habitat.

We are proposing, for the first time since 1991, to increase the price of the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, also known as the Duck Stamp. A \$10 increase will bring the price of the Duck Stamp to \$25, which if approved by Congress, would allow us to secure an additional 16,600 acres of bird habitat each year.

Oceans and Coastal (+\$900,000)

Increases in the Refuge Program will provide funding to the Palmyra Atoll Research Consortium (\$400,000), and the launch of the Marine Debris Campaign (\$500,000) for a total increase of \$900,000. Guided by the President's Oceans Action Plan and Executive Order 13366, the Department-wide Ocean and Coastal Frontiers Initiative acknowledges the importance of coastal and marine environments not only for fish and wildlife, but also for the economic health of the Nation. The Service plays a significant role in contributing its actions and expertise to the conservation and management of coastal and marine habitats, working cooperatively with science organizations, states and other natural resource managers.

Safe Borderlands (+\$1 million)

As part of the Department's Safe Borderlands initiative, the Service's budget proposes a \$1.0 million increase to add six law enforcement officers for refuge lands on the southwest border. Once experiencing only infrequent visitation, these refuges, and other public lands along the border, have become centers of illegal activity and frequent violence. In addition to the strain on law enforcement resources, the sheer number of people using refuge lands to cross the border is exacting a toll on wildlife and habitat. This initiative will help safeguard refuge resources, visiting public, and refuge staff.

Healthy Lands (+\$492,000)

The Department's 2009 Healthy Lands Initiative continues to address challenges associated with growing energy activities in the West and the potential conflicts that result at the wildlife-energy interface. The Service is emphasizing the Green River area in Wyoming, and will work cooperatively with the Wyoming State Game and Fish Department, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Geological Survey, and other stakeholders to provide increased assistance to private landowners in the Green River Basin to improve habitat and protect species on private lands; enhance planning and consultation to ensure energy development impacts to wildlife and habitat are effectively mitigated; and avoid unnecessary listing of species. The Service's efforts in support of the Department's Healthy Lands Initiative includes a \$492,000 increase for Partners for Fish and Wildlife for a total funding level of \$738,000. The Budget also retains base funding of \$492,000 for Candidate Conservation, \$492,000 for Consultation, and \$246,000 through the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

Refuges

Operation and maintenance of the National Wildlife Refuge System is funded at \$434.1 million, level with 2008. This includes the \$900,000 increase for ocean and coastal management activities and the \$1.0 million increase for additional law enforcement officers along the southwest boarder. The budget continues a focus established in 2008 for wild bird conservation activities as noted above.

Law Enforcement

The budget provides \$57.4 million for the law enforcement program, level with 2007 funding, and a reduction of \$2.3 million from the 2008 enacted level.

Endangered Species

The budget includes a total of \$146.8 million for Endangered Species, \$3.7 million below the 2008 level. The 2009 President's budget includes reductions for unrequested Congressional earmarks in 2008. The focus of the program is on streamlined management, increased collaboration and prioritizing species for action under the new Endangered Species Strategic Plan.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife

The 2009 President's budget includes an increase of \$492,000 for the Healthy Lands Initiative in the Green River Basin, offset by reductions for the discontinuation of funding for unrequested projects. The program will center most of its habitat restoration efforts on geographic focus areas identified in its recently completed strategic plan.

Fisheries

The budget includes a total of \$116.6 million for the fisheries and aquatic resources program, a net decrease of \$11.5 million compared to 2008. This includes program reductions of \$11.1 million, comprised of a reduction of \$5.9 million for fish passage, and the discontinuation of funding for one time activities and unrequested projects.

Grant Programs

State and Tribal Wildlife Grants are funded at the same level as the 2008 enacted level. The Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund is increased by \$1.7 million over the 2008 enacted level. The budget includes a request for new budget authority of \$80.0 million, an increase of \$6.2 million over 2008. This is offset by a \$4.5 million cancellation of prior year funds.

General Operations

General operations funding totals \$152.0 million, a net decrease of \$6.5 million. This includes program reductions of \$5.1 million, composed of reductions of \$985,000 for funds provided to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, \$2.4 million for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, and \$1.6 million for the international affairs program. The remainder of the HPAI funding, \$4.9 million, is transferred to the migratory bird management program. The Service will continue to carry out early detection and response planning to reduce the effects of HPAI on wild birds consistent with the U.S. Interagency Strategic Plan for avian influenza.

Construction

In 2009, the Service's priority will be operating programs in its core mission areas. Thus, the budget proposes a reduction in the construction budget for 2009. The construction request totals \$12.2 million, a decrease of \$21.0 million compared to the 2008 enacted level. Of this reduction, \$777,000 is for engineering services. The request includes funding of \$800,000 for completion of a visitor center at Neosho National Fish Hatchery in Missouri. It also includes \$1.2 million for migratory bird survey aircraft replacement.

Land Acquisition

The land acquisition request is \$10.2 million, a \$24.4 million reduction compared to the 2008 enacted level. Of this reduction, \$4.9 million is for acquisition management. The budget includes \$400,000 for land acquisition at the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge for bird, seal, and Steller sea lion conservation on St. George Island. It also includes \$500,000 for habitat protection and restoration at the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin.

Multinational Species Conservation Fund

The request includes \$4.3 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund, a decrease of \$3.6 million compared to 2008 enacted and equal to the 2008 President's budget request.

Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund

The request includes \$4.0 million for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, a decrease of \$470,000 compared to 2008 enacted and equal to the 2008 President's budget request.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify this afternoon. I would be happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee might have.