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TESTIMONY ON “GIANT SALVINIA: HOW DO WE PROTECT OUR  
ECOSYSTEMS?”**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (Foundation) and efforts to control and eradicate Giant Salvinia. The Foundation has supported conservation projects in the northwest Louisiana and eastern Texas and specifically funded grants to the Caddo Lake Institute for Giant Salvinia that I will discuss later in the testimony. The Foundation has also provided grants to the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Red River National Wildlife Refuge, and other non-profit organizations in Louisiana and Texas working to protect the region’s natural resources through conservation and education activities.

The Foundation was established by Congress in 1984 to leverage federal and private funds to conserve fish, wildlife, and their habitats. Since then, the Foundation has developed a successful model of fostering public-private partnerships to address the most significant threats to fish and wildlife populations and their habitats on private working lands and public lands. We have a particularly strong history in working with community-based organizations to support conservation actions that benefit fish, wildlife, plants and other natural resources while positively impacting local economies through improved recreation, tourism, and other business opportunities.

The Foundation has demonstrated its unique ability to bring together multiple federal agencies with state, tribal and local governments and private organizations to implement coordinated conservation strategies through grant-making programs. We employ this collaborative model to address invasive species and thank you for the opportunity to discuss our programs and the challenge of Giant Salvinia.

**Caddo Lake and Giant Salvinia**

Caddo Lake is a wetland of international significance that supports diverse species of fish, wildlife, and plants and provides unique recreational opportunities for the public. Caddo Lake is a popular destination for waterfowl hunters and fishermen in Louisiana and Texas and attracts visitors from across the country. These sporting activities as well as boating, canoeing, photography, bird watching, camping and other recreational activities are important to the local economy and are inextricably linked to the health of Caddo Lake.

In 1993, Caddo Lake was declared a wetland of international significance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, which is an international treaty that recognizes exemplary wetland systems across the world and provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Caddo Lake is one of only 27 wetlands in the United States recognized by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The

bald cypress forests of Caddo Lake, including trees as old as 400 years, host one of the highest breeding populations of wood ducks as well as prothonotary warblers and other neotropical birds. The forests and wetlands of Caddo Lake are critical for migratory bird species within the Central Flyway, including tens of thousands of migrating waterfowl that utilize Caddo Lake (and other nearby lakes) as resting and feeding grounds.

However, these internationally-recognized wetlands are threatened by Giant Salvinia, one of the world's most noxious aquatic weeds introduced from Brazil as part of the pet industry. Giant Salvinia grows rapidly and spreads across water surfaces, forming dense floating mats that reduce light penetration and result in oxygen depletion of the lake. This prevents growth of natural vegetation, a food source for waterfowl, and the mats of Giant Salvinia also eliminate open water on lake for waterfowl to use for resting purposes. Oxygen depletion below the mats of Giant Salvinia also impacts fish survival in the lake. Giant Salvinia was first identified in Louisiana in 2005, quickly spread into Texas in 2006, and infests lakes in both states.

### **Pulling Together Initiative: Supporting Community-Based Solutions to Invasive Species**

Invasive species like Giant Salvinia are one of the greatest threats to fish, wildlife, and plant biodiversity facing the United States and disrupt the economy and ecology of our nation. Invasive plants threaten private working lands and publicly protected lands and infest over 100 million acres in the United States. On public and private lands and waters of this country, invasive species negatively impact the natural systems on which we all depend and economic losses are estimated at over \$100 billion annually. It is our experience that a community-based, inter-jurisdictional approach based on a comprehensive and adaptive management plan is necessary to effectively address the problem of invasive species such as Giant Salvinia.

In order to help address the problem of invasive species, the Foundation and its federal agency partners established the Pulling Together Initiative in 1997 to provide financial support to help local communities effectively manage these plant invaders through cooperative management strategies for their control, eradication, and prevention.

The Pulling Together Initiative was created to specifically address the large scale problem of invasive plants in the United States by engaging a variety of local stakeholders in a comprehensive, long-term strategy to reduce the problem. The Foundation, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, and USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, brings together landowners, citizen groups, and weed experts to develop and implement strategies for managing invasive plant infestations on public lands, private working lands, and other natural areas. The cooperative approach of the program has played an instrumental role in invasive plant management across the country.

Interest in the program is strong and the Foundation was only able to fund one-fifth of the total funding requested in 2010. Grantees include local governments, non-profit organizations, Refuge friends groups, and others performing on-the-ground conservation efforts to combat invasive plants. All grant awards must be matched by non-federal contributions from project partners on at least a 1:1 basis. To date, the program has awarded \$17.9 million to 541 projects. Leveraged by an additional \$37.6 million in partner contributions, these grants have resulted in a total of \$55.5 million for local communities fighting invasive weeds.

In addressing invasive plants, grants emphasize the importance of local support by private landowners, state and local governments, and the regional/state offices of federal agencies that are committed to working together to manage invasive plants across their jurisdictional boundaries. To be successful, a long-term weed management plan should be developed based on an integrated pest management approach using the principles of ecosystem management and the plan should include a public outreach and education component.

We have found that the most successful approach to addressing invasive species is through Weed Management Areas – formal partnerships among public and private landowners working together using natural rather than political boundaries, such as a watershed, ecosystem, landscape, or county. The Pulling Together Initiative has helped to create numerous local Weed Management Areas, fund their ongoing stewardship work, and educate local communities about the magnitude of the crisis posed by the spread of invasive plants and what they can do to help address the problem.

The Foundation had an independent evaluation of the Pulling Together Initiative in 2009 to assess the effectiveness of the program and opportunities for improvement. They found that the grants result in strong and diverse partnerships and catalyze the formation of robust weed management organizations. In nearly all cases for the grantees surveyed, partnerships and weed control activities continue after the grant has ended. The evaluation concluded that the successful grantees engaged in weed control as a primary activity, utilized a variety of innovative approaches, and incorporated educational and public outreach activities. Most grantees utilize volunteers which help to extend resources and involve the broader community. With these comprehensive strategies in place, grantees reported a significant degree of success and “better controlled” weed infestations.

### **Pulling Together Initiative Grants to Caddo Lake Institute**

The Foundation awarded grants through the Pulling Together Initiative to the Caddo Lake Institute (Institute) in 2007 and 2008 to address aquatic invasive plants at Caddo Lake. Through these grants, the Institute positively engaged private shoreline-owners, cultivated media relationships, strengthened public education, and facilitated removal of Giant Salvinia from Caddo Lake. Most importantly, the Institute was empowered to work collaboratively with government agencies, residents, and other stakeholders to address Giant Salvinia at Caddo Lake. The Institute received two \$50,000 grants through the Pulling Together Initiative. Grant funds were leveraged by \$120,664 of matching contributions for a total investment of \$170,664.

A key part of the Institute’s success has been their public awareness campaign and recruitment of local volunteers. To foster volunteer participation, the Institute attended numerous community meetings and exchanged information with public and private stakeholders about biological, chemical, mechanical, and other physical control strategies. Through meetings with individual shoreline residents, the Institute helped private individuals deploy small-scale containment devices on a voluntary basis. Also during the grant period, the Institute developed and distributed a Field Guide to Invasive Aquatic Plants to help the public identify problem plants and assist in control efforts. Residents became better informed about control strategies and a stronger public participation process was established in partnership with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The Institute has been successful in working with federal, state and local governments to advance cooperative management efforts through public-private partnerships. Their work actively involves the public and has generated local, state and national media coverage of Giant Salvinia at Caddo Lake. We believe these are important accomplishments and these types of strategies can be employed on a larger scale at Caddo Lake and other areas infested with Giant Salvinia in Louisiana and Texas.

The Foundation has supported the existing partnership at Caddo Lake and we expect to continue to be a partner in the future. However, for the Foundation and its grantees to be effective, a collaborative and coordinated effort between the states with community engagement is necessary. We look forward to working with organizations and agencies in the region to build on their existing work and comprehensively address the problem of Giant Salvinia in the future.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this subject and we look forward to working with you to address this issue and other conservation concerns.

**Background on the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation**

As of FY 2010, the Foundation has awarded over 11,000 grants to national and community-based organizations through successful partnerships with the Department of Interior Agencies, USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and others. This collaborative model brings together multiple federal agencies with state, tribal and local governments and private organizations to implement coordinated conservation strategies in all 50 states. Since its inception, the Foundation has leveraged nearly \$530 million in federal funds into \$1.8 billion in on-the-ground and in-the-water conservation with less than 5% aggregate overhead to the federal government and fewer than 100 staff nationwide.

The Foundation's grant-making involves a thorough internal and external review process. Peer reviews involve federal and state agencies, affected industry, non-profit organizations, and academics. Grants are also reviewed by the Foundation's issue experts, as well as evaluation staff, before being recommended to the Board of Directors for approval. In addition, according to our Congressional Charter, the Foundation provides a 30-day notification to the Members of Congress for the congressional district and state in which a grant will be funded, prior to making a funding decision.