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## Preface

Our climate is changing, and these changes are already impacting the nation's valuable natural resources and the people, communities, and economies that depend on them (see Chapters 1 and 2). The observed changes in climate, in turn, have been directly correlated to the increasing levels of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere, which have set in motion a series of changes in the planet's climate system. Far greater changes are already inevitable because CO<sub>2</sub> stays in the atmosphere for a long time. Even if further GHG emissions were halted today, alterations already underway in the Earth's climate will last for hundreds or thousands of years. If GHG emissions continue, as is more likely, the planet's temperature is projected to rise by 2.0 to 11.5 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century, with accompanying major changes in extreme weather events, sea level rise, and acidification of our oceans. The pace and scale of these kinds of changes are expected to have major impacts on our natural resources and the communities and economies that depend on them.

The problem, therefore, is serious and urgent. The nation must prepare for and adapt to a changing climate to safeguard our valuable living resources for current and future generations. This *National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Climate Adaptation Strategy* (hereafter *Strategy*) is a call to action—a framework for effective steps that can be taken, or at least initiated, over the next five to ten years in the context of the changes to our climate that are currently projected by the end of the century. It is designed to be a key part of the nation's larger response to a changing climate, and to guide responsible actions by natural resource managers and other decision makers at all levels of government. The *Strategy* was produced by federal, state, and tribal representatives and has been coordinated with a variety of other climate change adaptation efforts at national, state, and tribal levels.

The overarching goal of the *Strategy* is a simple one: to inspire, enable, and increase meaningful action. Admittedly, the task ahead is a daunting one, especially if the world fails to make serious efforts to reduce emissions of GHGs. But we can make a difference. To do that we must begin now to prepare for a future unlike the recent past.

Because the development of this adaptation *Strategy* will only be worthwhile if it leads to meaningful action, it is directly aimed at several key groups: natural resource management agency leaders and staff (federal, state, and tribal); elected officials in both executive and legislative government branches (federal, state, local, and tribal); leaders in industries that depend on and can impact natural resources, such as agriculture, forestry, and recreation; and private landowners, whose role is crucial because they own more than 70 percent of the land in the United States. The *Strategy* should also be useful for decision makers in sectors that affect natural resources (such as energy, housing and urban development, transportation, and water systems), for conservation partners, for educators, and for the interested public, whose input and decisions will have major impacts on safeguarding the nation's living resources in the face of climate change. The *Strategy* also should be useful to those in other countries dealing with these same issues and those dealing with the international dimensions of climate adaptation.