

*Testimony of Jimmy Anthony, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries: to be presented March 29, 2012*

**H.R. 1917, To Authorize Joint Ventures for Bird Habitat Conservation Act:**

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is pleased to testify before the Natural Resources Committee on the authorization of the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures (JVs). Since organized JVs have played an invaluable role in wetlands conservation in Louisiana by helping to stimulate local partnerships of state and federal wildlife agencies, NGOs, academia, private corporations, landowners and citizens aimed exclusively at habitat conservation for migratory bird species and the many people who take enjoyment from them.

The origin of the JVs was the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), a landmark agreement signed by the United States and Canada to restore waterfowl populations to levels of the 1970s through wetland habitat restoration, enhancement and protection.

JVs are the functional units, including management boards, science teams, and habitat managers, that translate continental-scale waterfowl population goals into local-scale habitat conservation through integration of the best available science-based ecological information, habitat management experience and cooperative funding.

In Louisiana, Gulf Coast and Lower Mississippi Valley JVs provide science-based habitat objectives for waterfowl and shorebirds and invaluable resources to develop, fund, and deliver wetland conservation projects on public and private land in the state. The LMVJV was established in 1987 as the first JV to carry out bird habitat conservation in one of the six waterfowl habitat areas of major concern identified in the NAWMP.

JVs now include all migratory birds to create efficiency among multiple bird conservation efforts, and integrate with state wildlife action plans.

JVs develop, review, and recommend NAWCA grant proposals to fund wetland conservation projects that address scientifically-established habitat conservation goals as well as provide ecological and recreational benefits from those habitats.

The Joint Ventures provide a means of access for NAWCA funds to support our priority projects in Waterfowl management as outlined in the NAWMP. They also help Louisiana meet our bird conservation goals, including those in the State Wildlife Action Plan.

By partnering with the JVs, landowners get the personal satisfaction of making a sound investment in conservation that will benefit not only birds and other wildlife, but also future generations within their communities. In Louisiana one of our private partners allowed \$100,000 of his own work to be used to match a NAWCA grant on public land. He could have easily used that to offset his own monetary obligations, but instead donated it to the public.

Corporate partners' monetary contributions allow them to make valuable contributions to conserving our state's "natural capital" and the tremendous ecological goods and services they derive from them.

Through partnerships, JVs have leveraged every dollar appropriated by Congress 35: 1. The 2007 NAWMP Assessment commended the Joint Venture organizational/coordination model for impressive and innovative habitat conservation delivery, and the 25-year record of JV success has positioned them as the national model for partnership-driven conservation.

The Joint Ventures, along with NAWCA, are the most effective wetland restoration programs in the country, and we strongly support the legislation and urge the Committee to authorize the Joint Ventures for five years with annual appropriations of up to \$15 million.

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**H.R. 1960, To Reauthorize the North American Wetlands Conservation Act:**

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is pleased to testify before the Natural Resources Committee on the fifth reauthorization of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). Since enactment, NAWCA has played an invaluable role in wetlands conservation in Louisiana by helping to stimulate local partnerships aimed exclusively at habitat conservation for wetland-dependent species and the many people who take enjoyment from them. NAWCA continues to be an extraordinarily popular program among all who are involved. We commend Congress for their foresight in creating NAWCA in 1989 and repeatedly taking action to ensure the long-term success of this important program.

Since enactment, NAWCA has accomplished measurable success in Louisiana. This program has enhanced more than 500,000 acres across Louisiana. Reauthorization of NAWCA is critical in order to build on this success and ensure the health of high quality wetlands in our state.

Louisiana has the highest rate of coastal wetland or marsh loss in America. Currently, Louisiana loses 25 to 35 square miles or 16,000 to 22,000 acres, annually, which equates to losing an area the size of a football field every 30 minutes. Nearly 1,500 square miles of marsh have been lost over the past seven decades which represents about 1/3 of our historic total.

NAWCA joins efforts by natural resource managers and private, corporate and non-governmental partners to restore and enhance degraded habitat along with protecting the quality habitat that remains. The habitat work that is completed on both public and private lands improves recreational opportunities and provides economic benefits for landowners and communities. Wildlife-related recreation generates millions of economic output each year which is vital to rural Louisiana.

In addition to acting as filters to recharge groundwater supplies these restored wetlands act as important buffers in Louisiana's coastal regions, lessening the damage we receive from floods and hurricanes.

In Louisiana 47 NAWCA projects have been completed or are underway, with more to be approved this year. Over a half million acres of wetland and upland habitat has been preserved using these dollars, of which \$88 million out of a total \$121 million are match. One of the more successful NAWCA projects in Louisiana was completed in 2010, in the Black Lake Terracing Project. The Black Lake Terracing Project was a cooperative effort of 16 partners from numerous state, federal, corporate, nonprofit and other private groups who worked together to build more than 50 miles of marsh terraces to benefit 2,500 acres of vital marsh habitat.

In addition to being one of the federal government's most effective conservation programs, NAWCA is a model of fiscal responsibility as it provides an excellent return on a relatively modest federal investment. The law requires every federal dollar put into the program to be matched by at least \$1 in non-federal money. On average in Louisiana, partner match has been almost \$3 for every \$1 in federal money.

In Louisiana NAWCA serves as a vital tool for cooperative efforts to address landscape-level habitat challenges in vital areas for waterfowl such as the Lower Mississippi River Valley and the Gulf Coast.

What began in 1989 as a way to implement the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), the agreement between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico on how to manage waterfowl populations, has grown into a highly successful program with widespread support and success. NAWCA has stimulated hundreds of conservation partnerships that would not exist otherwise. The result is millions of acres of habitat conserved that provide untold benefits for wetlands, wildlife, and the public.

NAWCA is the most effective wetland restoration program in the country, and we strongly support the legislation and urge the Committee to reauthorize NAWCA for an additional five years with annual appropriations of up to \$75 million.

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**H.R. 3074, The Cormorant Management and Natural Resources Conservation Act:**

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is pleased to testify before the Natural Resources Committee on the Cormorant Management and Natural Resources Conservation Act.

A bill, HR 3074, has been introduced in Congress to delegate authority over Double Crested Cormorants (DCCO) management from Dept. of Interior to states upon approval of individual state management plans.

DCCO are a highly mobile migratory species; individuals removed from one location can be readily replaced by those from another; significant congregations of birds during migration impact local fish resources; and these foraging flocks may form and disperse quickly and unpredictably. Consequently, individual states are likely too small a scale to manage DCCO populations.

Needed monitoring and evaluation of both management actions and the DCCO populations at the state level to ensure a management plan meets Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) requirements will unnecessarily burden state agencies.

The 2003 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for management of DCCO is in review prior to expiration of the Depredation Orders currently being used to protect public resources and aquaculture facilities.

The Mississippi Flyway Council, a coalition of 14 states and 3 Canadian provinces that works in conjunction with the respective federal governments to manage migratory birds and their habitats, has recommended revisions to DCCO management in comments to the USFWS regarding the SEIS. Those revisions include: Shifting focus from “depredation” to “regional resource protection” whereby a target population of DCCO is established and individuals above that target may be taken. Increased flexibility and state control over methods of take to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

USFWS in consultation with Flyway Councils will develop framework for take of DCCO including season/action dates, methods of take, and associated regulations.

Because a regional approach is more efficient than administering/monitoring individual depredation orders, the USFWS can focus on monitoring DCCO populations to assure maintenance of target level. Individual states have already provided population targets in the 2010 Atlantic and Mississippi Flyway DCCO Management Plan.

A regional-scale population objective, integrated breeding population monitoring, a framework for take developed in cooperation with states, and increased state authority over methods of take

is most likely to accomplish the highest priority fundamental and means objectives of the SEIS which are to minimize conflicts and maintain a sustainable DCCO population in the Mississippi Flyway. Preliminary discussions with USFWS about Flyway comments and recommendations have been favorable.

Bird staff at Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries provided thoughtful, researched expertise regarding the Atlantic & Mississippi Flyways Double-crested Cormorant Management Plan (finalized in 2010)

An adequate comment period regarding the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment on the development of revised regulations governing the management of double-crested cormorants was afforded for La. bird staff as well. This staff agreed with comments from other states; that is, that the current depredation order system may have flaws, but flaws that can be overcome through alteration of that system, not with new legislation.

The aforementioned management plan proposed managing Double-crested Cormorants at a population level – roughly “flyway” level. Such a proposal was based on sound scientific reasoning of dozens of resource managers familiar with cormorant management.

H.R. 3047, seeks to remove Double-crested Cormorant from protection under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act: This action sets a precedent of removal of native bird species from federal protection, which should not be supported. This action works against the spirit of the multi-national acceptance of the MBTA. This action places increased financial burden upon States, while not addressing the fundamental issue of responsible management of native resources. Should this bill be approved, States should not provide management plans without federal funding that provides for the research, writing, and monitoring of such plans.

Currently, bird staff at the Department is tasked with monitoring waterbird nesting colonies. Recently, waterbird nesting colony surveys occurred in 2011, 2008, 2006, 2005..., etc. Such monitoring has produced few definitive Double-crested Cormorant colonies; instead, identification of breeding cormorants to species during aerial surveys is confounded by the similar looking Neotropic Cormorant, another native cormorant species. Breeding pairs of Double-crested Cormorant in La. likely does not far exceed 150 pairs.

H.R. 3047 does not account for the mobility of the Double-crested Cormorant, and, in fact, only utilizes the term “migratory” when referring to the MBTA.

The MBTA is critical for the protection of such “migratory” species, because those birds do not occur only as endemics in certain states. They are a national resource and should be treated and protected as such. Suggestions of treating Double-crested Cormorant management much like that of migratory game birds, such as waterfowl, makes infinitely more sense both functionally and biologically.

