

**Statement of
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Regional Director
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on
H.R. 3339, “FLTFA Reauthorization Act of 2009”**

**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Mr. Chairman, Representative Bishop, Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), our nation’s largest conservation advocacy and education organization, and our more than four million members and supporters, I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 3339, the FLTFA Reauthorization Act of 2009. Thanks to Congress’s leadership in passing the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA) in 2000, FLTFA provides a balanced approach to federal land management in the West. The National Wildlife Federation is part of a broad coalition of groups that supports permanent reauthorization of this important “land for land” conservation funding tool. I commend the Subcommittee for holding today’s hearing and Representative Martin Heinrich and Representative Cynthia Lummis for their bipartisan legislation.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank you and Representative Bishop for co-sponsoring reauthorization legislation so that the program will continue to provide benefits to the West.

I am a lifelong resident of New Mexico and an avid hunter and outdoors person. I currently serve as the National Wildlife Federation Regional Board Director in the southwest, working closely with the Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico Wildlife Federations. I also serve as a Governor Richardson’s appointee on the New Mexico State Game Commission. I reside in Albuquerque and own farms in Lucero and Peralta, New Mexico. I have a Bachelors of Science in Biology from the University of New Mexico and prior to this job, worked for over 20 years as a Manager in the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department and now operate my own business as an environmental consultant and planner.

Background

Congress passed FLTFA in 2000, with the support of the New Mexico congressional delegation. Since enactment, FLTFA has been a successful and balanced approach to land conservation, generating over \$100 million in revenue from Bureau of Land

Management (BLM) land sales. To date, the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture have approved over \$57 million toward protecting more than 13,600 acres of high-priority land.

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FLTFA uses a “land for land” approach. The sales of BLM lands identified for disposal under the Federal Land Planning Management Act (FLPMA) generate revenue to purchase critical inholdings and edgeholdings from willing sellers in federally designated areas managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service in the West. Through the BLM’s land use plans, developed through a public process, FLTFA advances conservation and economic development. The sales side of the program allows farmers, ranchers and others to purchase federal lands, increasing private land ownership in these places. Federal agencies in turn have less scattered, isolated tracts to manage and therefore no longer have to spend resources on these lands. On the acquisition side, willing landowners benefit by selling their properties. Federal land agencies can acquire priority inholdings for conservation, allowing for consolidated management.

In the West, where great portions of land are in mixed public-private ownership, sometimes in a checkerboard pattern, FLTFA provides a tool that benefits both private landowners and federal agencies. FLTFA promotes improved management of public land and gives landowners additional opportunities to buy scattered tracts of public land that have been deemed to be eligible for disposal through an approved BLM land use plan, following an opportunity for public notice and comment.

In a time of increased budget pressures, FLTFA provides an excellent way to use the sale of BLM land to generate funds to acquire high priority land for conservation, outdoor recreation and historic preservation. FLTFA complements private, state and other federal funding sources, helping leverage the purchase of these critical lands. Additionally, FLTFA allows the BLM to use up to twenty percent of the sales revenue to administer the program, therefore not imposing a burden on the taxpayer.

FLTFA projects in New Mexico and the West

In my state of New Mexico, FLTFA sales have generated over four million dollars. Through this revenue and other funding sources, FLTFA provided funding for four conservation projects, including the Elk Springs Area of Critical Environmental Concern, the La Cienega Area of Critical Environmental Concern, the Aztec Ruins National Monument, and the Santa Fe National Forest.

In the mesa tops located north of Albuquerque, the Nacimiento Mountains form the western boundary of the Santa Fe National Forest, providing critical habitat for Jemez elk and deer. In partnership with BLM, the Trust for Public Land, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Sandoval County and the New Mexico Wildlife Federation supported the Elk Springs Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) project in this woodland valley. The acquisition protected 2,200 acres and provided wintering habitat for a significant

portion of the Jemez elk and deer herds, while providing additional grazing opportunities for local ranchers, thereby benefiting rural communities. This addition to the Elk Springs ACEC showcases a great example of public-private cooperation, as the BLM is able to provide important wildlife habitat while also continuing its work with rural communities to protect an essential component of their economic base. Additionally, the project expanded public access and provided additional recreational opportunities to enjoy the area's dramatic vistas, steep cliffs, and rugged terrain. We appreciate the New Mexico delegation's support for this important conservation achievement.

In Wyoming, the FLTFA program led to successful results. FLTFA provided an opportunity to protect three significant places: the North Platte River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), the Bridger-Teton National Forest and Grand Teton National Park. In eastern Wyoming, south of Casper, the North Platte River provides "Blue Ribbon/Class I" trout fishing, supporting the highest pounds of trout per mile in any stream of Wyoming. *American Angler* recently named the area as the #1 spot in the lower 48 states to catch trophy rainbow and brown trout. In partnership with The Conservation Fund, Natrona County, Wyoming Game and Fish Department and Wyoming Fly Casters, the BLM purchased a 275-acre inholding containing 1.3 miles of river frontage along the North Platte River SRMA, from a willing seller using FLTFA funds. Through FLTFA, the BLM was able to provide public access to over a mile of fly-fishing, allow opportunities to boost the local recreation economy, and protect critical spawning ground for rainbow and brown trout.

In Arizona, FLTFA funded projects in Hells Canyon Wilderness, Tonto National Forest, and Coconino National Forest. In Utah, FLTFA funded a project at the iconic Zion National Park. All over the West, FLTFA provides funding for public agencies to expand public access for hiking, hunting, fishing, exploring and other activities.

Reauthorization

Unfortunately, FLTFA expires in July 2010. We commend Representative Heinrich's and Representative Lummis' leadership in introducing H.R. 3339, along with support from the bill's co-sponsors. We would respectfully encourage the Committee's support to reauthorize this important conservation program before it expires in 2010. We support H.R. 3339, which reauthorizes FLTFA with a few minor changes. H.R. 3339:

- Maintains the "land for land" principle in the current law
- Permanently reauthorizes FLTFA
- Strikes the date limitations. FLTFA contains date restrictions within both the sales and acquisitions components of the program. The current law does not allow proceeds from the sales of BLM lands identified in land use plans after 2000 to go to the FLTFA account; and in a similar manner, the current law does not allow designations after 2000 to receive FLTFA funds. The new law would allow any BLM land sale proceeds to go to the FLTFA program, and it would allow any designated area defined in the Act to qualify for FLTFA funding, regardless of the date of designation.

Additionally, in passing the original Act, Congress made clear that FLTFA would preserve county and local bills in place at the time, notably the Santini-Burton Act of 1980 and the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) of 1998. In the same spirit, H.R. 3339 preserves these county bills and also preserves the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2004 and the White Pine County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2006. In following this principle, we encourage the Committee to add the Washington County Growth and Conservation Act of 2008 and the Owyhee Public Lands Management Act of 2009 to the bill.

Closing remarks

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to highlight the success of FLTFA. Aldo Leopold once said, “Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land.” This conservation program embodies this principle, using a “land for land” approach to provide opportunities for landowners, outdoor enthusiasts and many others while also helping agencies meet their conservation goals. Because of this principle, this last year we have seen broad, diverse support for permanent reauthorization. This important program has the support of over 50 groups, including my own. This concludes my time and I welcome any questions.