

**Statement of
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**Prepared for the
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
Of the House Committee on Natural Resources**

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss with you the Sikes Act and its importance to the military. As you know, the Sikes Act **supports the warfighter** by preserving our ability to effectively use our lands to support needed testing and training; it **protects quality of life** for our military men and women and their families by facilitating a host of outdoor recreation opportunities; and, it **promotes efficiencies** by encouraging partnerships with many different national, regional, and local agencies and organizations.

Background

Military lands are often protected from human access and disturbance; as a consequence, they contain some of our Nation's most significant remaining large tracts of valuable natural resources. DoD manages over 28 million acres containing some 420 federally-listed threatened or endangered species, more than 520 species- at-risk, and many high- quality habitats. A surprising number of these species are endemic to military lands – that is, they are found nowhere else in the world – including more than ten listed species and at least 75 species- at-risk.

The Sikes Act is the fundamental linchpin for the success of the Department of Defense's (DoD) Natural Resources Conservation Program. For more than 50 years, the Act has proven instrumental in helping our installations coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and state fish and game agencies to develop many cooperative plans and projects that have benefited fish, game, and other natural resources on DoD lands. This has helped ensure that the Military Departments continue to be able to test and train efficiently and effectively. The true beauty of the Sikes Act is that it enables our natural resources professionals to successfully manage our Nation's natural resources for both military mission and long-term stewardship objectives.

DoD Implementation of the Sikes Act

Integrated natural resource management plans-- or INRMPs--are highly effective planning and implementation tools that benefit training and testing missions and long-term natural resources sustainability. INRMPs both direct daily natural resources management activities and serve as a strategic planning tool to enable us to make better informed investment decisions. These multiple benefits are possible because INRMPs provide a holistic view of an installation's natural resources at an ecosystem or broad landscape basis.

Our INRMPs have proven themselves to be highly successful planning and implementation documents. This is due, in part, because our installations develop their INRMPs in collaboration with federal and state resource management agencies and with the military operators responsible for both test and training. Thus, our INRMPs support mission requirements while satisfying our natural resources responsibilities. INRMPs are also living documents, subject to regular review by the parties. It is DoD policy to review and, if needed, to update our INRMPs on an annual basis. Reviewing these documents annually allows us to respond to changing military mission needs, as well as the needs of both the plant and animal species under our stewardship.

The Department has over 340 installations with significant natural resources, which means they must have an INRMP. Since 1998, the Department has invested over \$1.62 billion implementing the management practices and projects identified in our INRMPs, with \$165.6 million invested in fiscal year 2012 alone.

Examples of projects funded based on priorities established in these INRMPs include natural resource assessments; species and habitat monitoring programs; forestry and rangeland management; noxious and invasive weed control; adaptive management to address changing resources conditions; native habitat restoration; threatened and endangered species management; wildlife education; and recreational hunting and fishing programs, including increased access for disabled sportsmen.

INRMPs allow DoD to:

- Provide for comprehensive and up-to-date resource planning that facilitates real-time adaptive management practices;
- Enhance the installation commander's ability to ensure that mission requirements are met while better managing installation natural resources; and
- Take full advantage of the expertise of USFWS and state resource agency personnel; and
- Preserve the installation commander's discretion to ensure military preparedness, without compromising the USFWS's or a state agency's ability to exercise the legal authorities they each possess independent of the Sikes Act.

Important Supplemental Amendments

Since passage of the landmark 1997 amendments to the Sikes Act that first required installation commanders to prepare and implement INRMPs for all bases with significant natural resources, DoD's natural resources management has benefited from several important subsequent amendments to the Act.

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1999, the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act required DoD to ensure that outdoor recreational opportunities be made more readily available to disabled persons. Over the past 14 years, DoD has taken significant strides to fulfill the goals of this law. It is DoD policy to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to the same outdoor recreation opportunities as the general public, when consistent with the military mission and where safe or otherwise practicable. Our INRMPs address the appropriate level of public access to ensure consistency with installation security, military mission, and sustainable natural resources management. The Department has also made available handicapped accessible nature trails; bird/wildlife viewing platforms; pier access; wheel chair ramps for improved access; and some specialized equipment and facilities for disabled sportsmen and Wounded Warrior programs to facilitate additional hunting and fishing opportunities.

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004, Congress amended the Endangered Species Act to recognize the significant contributions INRMPs make to promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species. The amendment provides that where the USFWS or the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration determines, in writing, that the management benefits provided by INRMPs outweigh the benefits of designating critical habitat on the military lands encompassed by that INRMP, such as critical habitat. This provision recognizes the value, scientific rigor, and flexibility of INRMPs as an alternative to critical habitat designation in promoting the conservation of imperiled species. This alternative procedure has been used to obviate the need to designate critical habitat on 71 different installations – including proposed designations for multiple species on 20 installations – since its enactment. In each of these cases, the USFWS or NMFS determined that the INRMP provides comparable or better protection for the given species and its habitat than critical habitat designation would have provided.

In the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, Congress amended Section 103A of the Sikes Act to authorize cooperative agreements to maintain and improve natural resources located *off* military installations where doing so may relieve or eliminate current or anticipated restrictions on military activities. This provision gives installation commanders the flexibility to address some portion of their conservation responsibilities—especially those related to ESA-listed and candidate

species—by supporting natural resources projects off of their installations, preserving their discretion to use installation lands to support critical military training and testing.

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010, Congress expanded the scope of the Sikes Act to include state-owned Army National Guard installations. These installations are used to train both Guard and Active Duty soldiers to the same military standards. With this amendment, state-owned National Guard installations that receive federal funding for Guard training are now covered by the Sikes Act and required to develop and implement INRMPs. This means funding may now be provided for specific natural resources projects, such as wetlands protection, habitat management for sensitive species, and soil erosion control, on Army Guard facilities. This will encourage strategic investment decisions based on holistic management in the same manner as on active Army installations, and improve our ability to manage natural resources on 47 installations totaling 469,054 acres across 30 states and territories. It also means that the 20 state-operated, state-owned, federally supported Army Guard installations with federally listed species, and the four installations with candidate species proposed for listing, may be able to avoid critical habitat designation.

DoD and its Military Departments appreciate the efforts of this Committee, the USFWS, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, in developing these and other amendments to strengthen and improve the Sikes Act.

Conclusion

Installation natural resources professionals within the Military Departments must continue to demonstrate that the two goals of supporting the military mission and protecting natural resources are compatible. With upfront planning, we will continue to make effective and cost-efficient management decisions. As we have for more than 50 years, we will look for new ways in which this landmark legislation can continue to protect our Nation's safety and its priceless natural resources.

In closing, Mister Chairman, I sincerely thank you for this opportunity to discuss the Sikes Act, its applications, and its importance to the military. We appreciate your strong support of our mission and our troops. I will be happy to answer any questions.