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Testimony on H.R. 1960, the North American Wetlands Conservation Extension Act ,
H.R. 1917 and the Joint Ventures for Bird Habitat Conservation Act

Before the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee,

I am Glenn Olson. I serve as the Donal O'Brien Chair in Bird Conservation and Public Policy of the National Audubon Society.

National Audubon Society's 25 state offices and more than 460 local chapters throughout the United States serve more than one million members and supporters. Audubon's mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity. Our national network includes more than 80 community-based nature centers with scientific and educational programs, engaging millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in positive conservation experiences.

Audubon is the North American partner of Birdlife International, a global alliance of conservation organizations working together for the world's birds and people. With our Birdlife partners in the Western Hemisphere we have identified more than 2,450 globally significant Important Bird Areas. These Important Bird Areas include the essential sites for 40% of our breeding North American Birds that migrate and winter in Latin America or the Caribbean, the so-called Neotropical migrants.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on these critically important initiatives. Audubon strongly supports H.R. 1960, the North American Wetlands Conservation Extension Act and H.R. 1917, the Joint Ventures for Bird Habitat Conservation Act. We commend Congressman Rob Wittman and Congressman Ron Kind for recognizing the value of two of America's most important conservation programs and for sponsoring these two important bills to support and continue their long track record of successful bird conservation.

I can and will speak from personal experience as a founder and chairman of the Central Vally Joint Venture, which was among the first established in the mid-1980's. And, more recently, from my experience as a member of the NAWCA council appointed by Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar in 2010. At that same time Secretary Salazar appointed me to the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Advisory Council.

My main message to you is this: The North American Wetlands Conservation Act –

NAWCA- together in collaboration with Migratory Bird Joint Ventures -- has been the most effective bird conservation initiative of the past 2 decades.

What started in the mid 1980's by the Reagan Administration as a response to the dramatic decline in waterfowl populations across the continent has had more positive impacts on all migratory birds than any other single initiative. When the Reagan Administration signed a treaty with Canada and later with Mexico, we launched into the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. This plan led to the creation of Joint Ventures in key waterfowl areas across the continent.

These Joint Ventures brought together hunters and sportsmen, conservationists and environmentalists, state and federal agencies, farmers and ranchers – in California, the Rice Industry became a full partner to the joint venture and has contributed as much as any partner to sustaining the migratory bird resources of the Pacific Flyway. With their winter flooding of nearly 500,000 acres of rice fields, they have nearly doubled the amount of roosting and feeding areas for waterfowl, cranes, colonial waterbirds and shorebirds. This is a great partnership.

The Joint Venture was a unique creation that worked beyond anyone's expectation. It created a worthwhile goal of restoring habitats for the migratory birds whose populations were plummeting. In California, 60% of the 10 million migratory birds of the Pacific Flyway winter in the California's Central Valley. California's population stood at 30 million people and was projected to grow to 50 million over the next 30 years. We needed to do something intentional and pro-active to sustain the migratory bird resource for future generations.

The Joint Venture brought together groups that did not work together previously. Groups and agencies as diverse as California Waterfowl Association, Ducks Unlimited, the California Department of Fish and Game, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Defenders of Wildlife, and Audubon came together in the face of the dramatic decline in waterfowl populations to work together towards arresting the decline and restoring the habitat and sustaining the resource for the future.

Audubon hosted the early Central Valley Joint Venture meetings in those initial years. We were considered neutral territory, like Switzerland, for groups that didn't get along. Also, funders wanted to know that groups were collaborating on habitat conservation efforts so that their contributions would be more effective. This led to our Joint Ventures planning how we would work together, what are priorities should be and who could best implement the various initiatives.

I brought Congressman Silvio Conte out to the Central Valley. Rep Conte was the ranking Republican on the Appropriations Committee and made all of the motions on the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission. We went duck hunting. He did not shoot a duck but in the fog nearly shot a cormorant. When he returned to Washington he was able to support the first conservation easements for wetlands in the Butte Sink, the Grasslands and the Colusa Basin for California using duck stamp monies that hunters fund to hunt ducks.

There are many stories that could be told but let me just focus a bit on the role of the private sector in helping us implement the Central Valley Joint Venture.

- (1) Joe Long was the Chairman of Long's Drug Stores. He had been president of the Wild Goose Duck Club but no longer hunted ducks-his eyes watered and couldn't see to shoot straight but he still cared. He made several trips with me to the Mapes Ranch west of Modesto to look at Christman Island, a 780 acre

riparian, oak woodland habitat, critical habitat for the Aleutian Canada Goose and there was a rookery of herons and egrets in the Oak trees...He gave 33,000 shares of Long's drugs stock to acquire that site and we later transferred it to the US Fish and Wildlife Service to establish the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge. Several years later at the Mapes Ranch we held a celebration downlisting the Aleutian Canada Goose- it was no longer endangered.

- (2) David Packard was chairman of Hewlett Packard and was also Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Nixon Administration. His foundation made early grants to each member of the Joint Venture to help insure collaboration. He funded Audubon to restore 600 acres of bufferlands around the Regional Sanitation Plant south of Sacramento. We used the Sacramento Job Corps to do the wetland restoration work as they had a training program with the Operating Engineers for heavy equipment. I think Mr Packard was more excited about the kids doing the work than about the results for the birds...but he loved it all and became a major supporter of Audubon's flyway work throughout the west.

- (3) This same project required the approval of the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors as we were leasing land from the Sanitation district. I lobbied with Chris Steele, a local developer who was president of the BIA- Building Industry Association. I still remember Chris's pitch to the Supervisors: "If we aren't careful and don't plan well, we won't know when we have left North Stockton and hit South Sacramento, it will all be connected. The Upper Beach Lake Bufferlands project on the Sanitation District lands led to the establishment of the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, and we still will have an open space buffer between Stockton and Sacramento.

- (4) Steve Bechtel, retired CEO of the Bechtel Company that built Hoover Dam and the Metro Subway system here in DC, among other things, has been a huge supporter of the Joint Venture's wetlands conservation work in the Pacific Flyway. He has personally restored wetlands on his property in the Sacramento Valley. He has invested in the Southern San Joaquin Valley in the Tulare Lake Basin, where wetlands restoration is more challenging because water is so limited, and he has encouraged others to join him. Beyond that he has funded the migratory bird conservation efforts of several JV partners especially as it relates to working collaboratively with private

farmers and ranchers.

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act has supplied nearly \$1 billion in federal funds (much of that from an interest account on taxes on imported arms and ammo). This has been matched by over \$ 3 billion in partner matching funds. This has resulted in over \$4 billion going to restoring and conserving wetlands for migratory birds throughout the 4 Flyways of North America....45% in Canada, 50% in the USA, and 5% in Mexico.

Why has it worked so well? Well, the Federal funds provide a catalyst that primes the pump for the private sector. With the Joint Ventures around the country made up of all the stakeholders, they rank each NAWCA proposal based on its value to the resource and the priorities of their plans. When the proposals arrive at the NAWCA Council, they have been vetted both locally and nationally. On the NAWCA council we have 1 representative from each of the 4 flyways...currently, that includes the director's of State Fish and Game agencies for North Dakota, Utah, Kentucky and Massachusetts, in addition to the NGO's such as Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy and Audubon.

I am enclosing a copy of the most recent summary of the NAWCA grants. But let me just highlight our most recent grants to Mexico. The council approved grants for \$3 million that were matched by \$ 9 million in partner funds. Here is some of what those funds are doing:

- (1) Sustaining the Black Brant in the Baja Ca lagoons where they winter. These birds breed on the Y-K Delta of Alaska, molt at Teshapuk Lake on the North Slope of Alaska, stage at Isembek Lagoon NWR in Alaska and fly 48 hours straight to Baja
- (2) Protecting lagoons such as San Quentin and Magdalena Bay. These lagoons still have the Eel Grass beds intact that the Brant feed on and that have been largely lost in CA. The grants will sustain the lagoons and the local watersheds as well.
- (3) Securing habitat for waterfowl on the Laguna Madre. The Laguna Madre on the Texas- Mexico border, is the major wintering ground for Redhead Ducks in North America. This project protects the habitat on the Mexican side of the Laguna Madre.
- (4) Providing water to reach the Colorado River estuary in the Gulf of California. This was the area described by Aldo Leopold in his famous book Sand County Almanac as the "Green Lagoons" that were teeming with waterfowl and wildlife. This grant ensures that the water from Mexicali upgrading their sewage treatment plant will go to re-watering the Colorado River and restoring the estuary. These projects are co-led by Ducks Unlimited Mexico and Audubon's Birdlife partner, Pro Natura.

In closing, let me say that Audubon thinks enough of the NAWCA/Joint Venture

approach to have recently completely realigned our 100 year-old organization to follow the birds along the Flyways....our new strategic plan organizes all of our conservation work through the 4 Flyways...and we have re-framed our scope to include the entire Western Hemisphere.

I have been involved with the Joint Ventures now for over 25 years...I can not think of a more effective and significant way to have made a difference for birds, people and our planet than the course I have chosen. You all here in Congress helped immensely by approving NAWCA in 1989 and by appropriating catalyzing funds over these past 22 years. Thank you. Let's keep it going.

Thank you and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.