

TESTIMONY OF PAUL R. SCHMIDT, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR MIGRATORY BIRDS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE, ON H.R. 3537, JUNIOR DUCK STAMP CONSERVATION AND DESIGN PROGRAM REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2009; H.R. 2213, A BILL TO REAUTHORIZE THE NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION ACT; AND H.R. 3433, A BILL TO AMEND THE NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION ACT

September 22, 2009

Chairwoman Bordallo, Ranking Member Brown, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Paul Schmidt, Assistant Director for Migratory Birds for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to testify on behalf of the Department of the Interior on three important pieces of legislation related to migratory birds: H.R. 3537, Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Reauthorization Act of 2009; H.R. 2213, a bill to reauthorize the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act; and H.R. 3433, a bill to amend the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. The Department supports all three of these bills and greatly appreciates the Subcommittee's continued leadership and support for the conservation of the nation's migratory birds.

Introduction

Migratory birds are among nature's most magnificent natural resources, and they play a significant ecological, economic and cultural role in the United States and around the globe. Like canaries in coal mines, birds are indicators of the health and quality of our environment. The Service's Migratory Bird Program has two primary goals: (1) to conserve migratory bird populations and their habitats in sufficient quantities to prevent them from being considered as threatened or endangered and (2) to ensure the citizens of the United States continue to have opportunities to enjoy migratory birds and their habitats. The Service pursues these goals in concert with a host of participating partners, both domestic and foreign. The Service also serves as the lead Federal agency responsible for protecting, managing and conserving the species of birds covered by four major treaties with Canada, Mexico, Russia, and Japan through their implementing legislation, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

Birds are tremendous engines for local economies; each year millions of Americans watch birds in their backyards and on National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, National Forests and other federal lands, as well as at state and local birding hot spots. In fact, the 2006 Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in conjunction with the Federal census, showed that 48 million Americans watched birds, and wildlife watchers generated \$122.6 billion in total industrial outputs.

On March 19, 2009, Secretary Salazar announced the release of the State of the Birds 2009 Report, which shows that while a number of species are healthy or recovering, many are in decline. This report, a partnership product led by the Service and coordinated with the U.S. Geological Survey, the American Bird Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Cornell Lab of

Ornithology, the National Audubon Society, and many other organizations, is the first of an annual and collective effort to monitor the health of our nation's birds, and will help us monitor the condition of their environments and the success of our conservation efforts. The State of the Birds 2009 Report is a part of what the Service envisions as a broader and more collaborative approach to conserving birds in order to enhance the protection of their habitats while helping these landscapes to be more resilient to climate change.

H.R. 3537, Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Reauthorization Act of 2009

The Federal Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program (Program) was authorized through the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-340), which was enacted on October 6, 1994. The Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to carry out the Junior Duck Stamp Program, including conducting an annual art competition to create a stamp and licensing and marketing the stamp. The proceeds from these efforts are used to support conservation education programs, awards and scholarships for Junior Duck Stamp Program participants.

In addition to the annual art contest for the design of the Stamp, the program features a science and art-based curriculum designed to help teach wetland and wildlife conservation principles, engaging children from kindergarten through high school by pairing science and the arts. The program's goal is to empower and encourage students to become conservation stewards who will work to conserve sustainable populations of migratory birds and many other wetland-dependent plants and animals.

In 2009, nearly 28,000 students across the United States, including the District of Columbia and the territories, entered the contest, and thousands more participated in the curriculum. The 2009 national winning design of a wood duck entered by a 16-year-old student from Toledo, Ohio, now graces the eighteenth Junior Duck Stamp. In 2008, Junior Duck Stamp sales raised more than \$172,000 for awards, environmental education activities throughout the U.S. and its territories, and Junior Duck Stamp marketing materials.

H.R. 3537, reauthorizes the program, increases authorization for appropriations to \$500,000 per year, removes limitations on the use of funds for administrative expenses and amends the Program's reporting requirements. The Department supports H.R. 3537 as it would enable the Service to more effectively implement the Junior Duck Stamp Program.

H.R. 2213, The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act

Through bilateral treaties with Canada, Mexico, Japan and Russia, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Service has responsibility for maintaining healthy populations of hundreds of native migratory birds, including 341 species that migrate from or through the United States to Latin America and the Caribbean and are covered by the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

Migratory birds help control agricultural pests, pollinate many commercially valuable plants and provide bird-related recreational opportunities for millions of people. Unfortunately, many migratory bird species are declining as a result of habitat loss and degradation, particularly in the Caribbean and Latin America. The fact that many, if not most, neotropical migratory bird species have “two homes” -- the United States and a Caribbean or Latin American country -- increases the challenges associated with conserving them.

In authorizing the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act in 2000, Congress provided a mechanism for coordinating and funding the conservation of neotropical migratory birds and their habitats throughout Latin America, the Caribbean and North America. Modeled after other international conservation programs including the Multinational Species Conservation Funds and the North American Wetland Conservation Act grants program, the Act recognized the need for international cooperation in these conservation efforts and established an effective and targeted matching grant program. The Service strives to implement the Act as a complement to other programs that seek to protect and restore neotropical migratory bird habitat in the United States.

Administered by the Service’s Migratory Bird Program, grants are awarded for projects that promote the long-term conservation of migratory birds through partnership. These projects protect and manage bird habitat, conduct research and monitoring, support law enforcement, and provide education and outreach.

Since receiving appropriations in FY 2002, the Service has funded 296 projects, throughout the United States, Latin America and Caribbean with more than \$30 million. In FY 2009, 124 grant proposals were received and 36 were funded. While the statute currently requires a 3:1 match for all grant requests, partners have contributed nearly \$135 million in matching funds, representing a match ratio of more than 4:1. As a result, the program has achieved significant on-the-ground results, including restoring island bird species in the Caribbean, protecting and reforesting 8,000 acres of wintering habitat for Neotropical migrants in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, and studying the effects of bison on bird habitat diversity. The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act is helping the United States and our international partners address the threats to neotropical migratory birds and reduce the likelihood that they will need the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

The Department supports H.R. 2213 to reauthorize the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

H.R. 3433, A Bill To Amend the North American Wetlands Conservation Act

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) is an internationally recognized conservation program that supports partnerships to conserve waterfowl and other wetland-associated migratory birds. Since 1990, more than 11,500 partners have been involved in 1,946 NAWCA grant projects. More than \$1 billion in grants has leveraged more than \$2 billion in matching funds to affect approximately 25.5 million acres of wetlands and associated uplands across the continent.

H.R. 3433 would amend NAWCA to allow up to 50 percent of the required “non-federal” match for projects in Canada to be composed of Canadian funds. Under current law, all such funds must be from U.S. sources, and Canadian funds contributed to NAWCA projects cannot be counted as part of the “non-federal” match. If this measure were enacted, Canadian projects would be able to reach their non-federal funding requirements.

The Department supports H.R. 3433 and its proposed change to NAWCA as long as at least 50 percent of the “non-federal match” would still come from United States sources. The change in this historic conservation statute would better acknowledge the importance of the U.S. partnership with Canada and would be more consistent with the non-U.S. funding match that is already allowed for Mexican NAWCA projects.

NAWCA grants act as catalysts in bringing together partnerships to support wetland projects and leverage non-federal funding. Grants have brought together partners as diverse as conservation organizations; federal, state and local government agencies; and private industry, and thousands of private landowners. Partners have carried out projects in all 50 U.S. states, 12 Canadian provinces and territories, and 23 Mexican states.

Conclusion

Protecting and conserving migratory birds is one of the primary public trusts held by the Service. The three programs being considered today have all greatly improved the Service’s ability to meet our mission. The Junior Duck Stamp Program has enabled the Service to educate and encourage young Americans to step up to the plate as conservation stewards. The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act have greatly enhanced our ability to protect birds and their habitat for future generations.

We greatly appreciate your leadership, Chairwoman Bordallo and Ranking Member Brown, in enhancing and refining our statutory authorities to conduct this important work. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that the diversity and health of the nation’s native bird species are sustained.