

**TESTIMONY OF DAN ASHE, DIRECTOR,
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BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, OCEANS AND INSULAR AFFAIRS,
REGARDING THE FISCAL YEAR 2013 BUDGET OF THE
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**

March 6, 2012

Good morning Chairman Fleming and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Dan Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on the Service's Fiscal Year 2013 budget request. I would also like to thank the Subcommittee for its continued support of our mission to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Service's FY 2013 budget request will focus funding on the bureau's highest priority conservation initiatives, while containing costs through management efficiencies and other savings. The \$1.55 billion request includes a \$200 million cancellation of prior year unobligated balances and program increases for our high priority needs of \$72 million compared to the FY 2012 enacted budget. The budget also includes approximately \$995 million available under permanent appropriations, most of which will be provided directly to States for fish and wildlife restoration and conservation.

The budget focuses on large-scale conservation efforts by supporting the President's America's Great Outdoors initiative. This initiative is focused on how the Federal government can best advance those priorities through public-private partnerships and locally supported conservation strategies. Additionally, the Service engages partners, including other Federal agencies, to work collaboratively and share resources to implement a scientifically-based landscape conservation approach to address key conservation challenges that threaten the nation's fish and wildlife resources.

The Service supports the President's America's Great Outdoors initiative with a request of \$106.9 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for Federal land acquisitions the Service has identified as having the greatest conservation benefits. The Service's budget request also includes \$13.6 million to support Youth in the Great Outdoors by providing a platform and programs to orient children and young adults from varied backgrounds to work together on conservation projects which impart the importance of fish and wildlife conservation and encourage careers in natural science.

The budget proposes an increase of \$4.0 million for activities associated with energy development, including: \$1.5 million for the Endangered Species Consultation program to support assessments of renewable energy projects; \$750,000 for Conservation Planning Assistance to enhance the Service's participation in priority landscape level planning for the

siting of renewable energy projects and transmission corridor infrastructure; \$750,000 to strengthen migratory bird conservation in areas with wind developments; and \$1 million for enforcement of wildlife protection laws to lessen the impact of energy development on wildlife resources.

The Service believes very strongly on the necessity of cross-programmatic partnerships to maximize efficiencies and leverage resources to achieve conservation goals. The FY 2013 budget request includes an increase of \$5.4 million for a Cooperative Recovery initiative in which the National Wildlife Refuge System, Endangered Species, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Fisheries, Migratory Birds and the Science programs focus on implementing recovery actions for endangered species on National Wildlife Refuges and surrounding ecosystems.

Science is a critical component of any conservation action. The FY 2013 budget request includes \$6.0 million for increased science work on discrete project needs. Of the additional science funding, \$2.0 million will support the continued development and operation of a comprehensive Asian carp early detection and surveillance program through scientific studies such as eDNA analysis, and \$1.0 million will support pesticide consultations to help ensure the Nation's waters are suitable for recovery and restoration of imperiled aquatic and aquatic-dependent species. Additionally, a \$3.0 million increase in science funding will be used to continue building the landscape scale, long-term refuge inventory and monitoring network that the Service began in FY 2010 so that wildlife and habitats are understood and conservation actions are well informed. These inventory and monitoring efforts complement Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) development and adaptive science management.

The Service includes \$12.4 million to fund fixed costs which include adjustments for Federal employer contributions to health benefit plans, unemployment and workers compensation, and rent. In addition, over the last two years, the Administration has implemented a series of performance and management reforms to achieve efficiencies and cut costs across the government. The Department of the Interior's goal is to reduce administrative spending by 20 percent or \$207 million from the 2010 levels by the end of 2013. To meet this goal, the Department is leading efforts to reduce waste and create efficiencies by reviewing projected and actual administrative spending and to allocate efficiency targets for bureaus and Departmental offices to achieve the 20 percent target.

Cooperative Landscape Conservation

The LCCs will continue to act as a focal point for collaborative work with partners to disseminate applied science products and tools for resource management decisions across landscapes. This collaboration provides partners scientific information so they can target resources and activities that will produce the greatest benefits for fish and wildlife for the American people. Within the Service, LCCs help support and augment, but not duplicate, many ongoing programs, including Endangered Species Recovery Plans, Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plans, fish passage programs and habitat restoration. The FY 2013 budget will continue to support the national network of 22 LCCs. In response to Congressional direction, the Service will focus funding on the 14 most developed of the 18 FWS-led LCCs.

National Wildlife Refuge System

Funding for the operation and maintenance of the National Wildlife Refuge system is requested at \$494.8 million. The request includes an increase of \$9.1 million, enabling Refuges to complete additional habitat improvement projects. Included in this amount is \$2.5 million for Cooperative Recovery to address current threats to endangered species on and around wildlife refuges and \$3.6 million for the Challenge Cost Share program which funds a variety of small-scale projects with partners. An additional \$1.0 million will be used for refuge law enforcement to respond to drug production and smuggling, wildlife poaching, illegal border activity, assaults and a variety of natural resource violations.

Law Enforcement

The budget request provides \$63.9 million for the law enforcement program to investigate wildlife crimes and enforce the laws that govern the Nation's wildlife trade. The request is \$1.8 million above the 2012 enacted level, of which \$1.0 million will bolster law enforcement activities that address the impact of energy development on wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Endangered Species

The budget includes \$179.7 million to administer the Endangered Species Act, an increase of \$3.7 million when compared with the 2012 enacted level. This includes a \$1.5 million increase for renewable energy consultation, \$1.0 million for science for pesticide consultation, and \$400,000 for cooperative recovery of endangered species on wildlife refuges and in surrounding ecosystems.

The Service also is requesting funding be shifted to Listing from within the subcap for critical habitat designation for already listed species. In addition, the request includes an increase of \$1.6 million to address the backlog of listing determinations for candidate species, including critical habitat designations. This increase for Listing will be used to meet the terms and conditions of settlements and allow the Service to address the highest biological priorities of the Listing program for the years ahead. The funding in Listing will allow the Service to publish approximately 13 additional proposed or final rules in FY 2013.

Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Conservation

The budget request includes a total of \$131.6 million for the Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Conservation program, a decrease of \$3.7 million from the 2012 enacted level. Facilitating the Service's role and responsibility in promoting ecosystem health, fisheries, and aquatic resource conservation, the budget includes increases of \$2.9 million for Asian carp prevention and control activities, \$1.5 million for fish passage improvements, and \$800,000 for the Service's cross-programmatic Cooperative Recovery initiative which focuses on recovering endangered species on wildlife refuges and in surrounding ecosystems. The request also includes an increase of \$1.6

million for the Klamath Basin to restore high-priority stream habitats and recover listed and native fish species.

National Fish Hatchery Operations – Mitigation

The FY 2013 request contains a reduction of funding for National Fish Hatchery general program activities of \$3.2 million. At several of its hatcheries, the Service produces fish to mitigate the adverse effects of Federal water development projects constructed by other Federal agencies. States depend on these activities to stock fisheries which provide significant economic benefit to local communities. At the direction of Congress, the Service is working to recover costs from the Federal agencies that built and operate these water infrastructure projects. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the largest customer for these mitigation fish and negotiations. Service efforts are proceeding to recover the \$4.7 million necessary to fund mitigation fish production. In addition, the FY 2013 Bureau of Reclamation request includes \$600,000 to fund mitigation fish production which will be used to reimburse the Service. The Service will continue discussions with the Tennessee Valley Authority to negotiate reimbursement for this activity.

Migratory Birds

The Migratory Birds program is funded at \$51.1 million, just slightly below FY 2012 enacted level. The North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, a flagship program for conservationists and sportsmen alike, is funded at \$39.4 million, an increase of \$3.9 million over 2012 enacted.

International Affairs

The budget request provides the International Affairs program with \$13.1 million, almost level with the 2012 enacted level. The Multinational Species Conservation Fund is funded at \$10.0 million, an increase of \$514,000 over the 2012 enacted level.

Coastal Impact Assistance Program

Under the Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP), the Secretary of the Interior was authorized to distribute \$250 million for each of the fiscal years 2007 through 2010 to offshore oil producing States and their coastal political subdivisions (CPS) to support the conservation, protection and preservation of coastal areas, including wetlands. This money is shared among Alabama, Alaska, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas and is allocated to each producing State and eligible CPS based upon legislated allocation formulas.

CIAP funding supports projects for the conservation, protection, or restoration of coastal areas, including wetlands; mitigation of damage to fish, wildlife, or natural resources; planning assistance and administrative costs; and mitigation of the impact of OCS activities through funding of onshore infrastructure projects and public service needs. The FY 2013 budget proposes that \$200 million of the remaining \$565 million in unobligated funds for CIAP be permanently cancelled.

In sum, the Service's budget request makes some tough choices, generating program reductions and management savings, while supporting our effort to transform the agency to meet the conservation challenges of the 21st century.

By building science capacity and focusing on strategic, partnership-driven landscape conservation, this budget will enable us to be more effective and efficient with the funding we receive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. I am happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.