

**TESTIMONY OF DAN ASHE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR ,
BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR
AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE HEARING ON
H.R. 5284, THE SIKES ACT AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2010
May 25, 2010**

Chairwoman Bordallo, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on H.R. 5284, the Sikes Act Amendments Act of 2010. I am Dan Ashe, Deputy Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) within the Department of the Interior (Department). The Department appreciates your interest in conserving fish and wildlife habitats on military installations and your leadership in this reauthorization of the Sikes Act.

The Department, the states, and Department of Defense (DOD) have long recognized the importance and value of working cooperatively to conserve fish and wildlife resources on military lands. Military lands provide valuable habitat for fish and wildlife, as well as significant opportunities for hunting, fishing and other wildlife-associated recreation. The Sikes Act, and its amendments, have fostered an effective framework for our partnership with DOD and the states. Through this partnership, we have been able to increase our abilities to conserve living resources found on military installations, while also supporting the national defense and other missions of lands managed by the DOD. The Department supports the management of invasive species with an emphasis on preventing their establishment on military lands. The Department supports HR 5284, but recognizes that a statutory requirement to manage and control invasive species on military lands as a part of INRMPS could be burdensome. We will be glad to work with the Subcommittee and DOD to ensure that invasive species threats to both fish and wildlife conservation and DOD goals for military lands are minimized.

History of the Sikes Act

Prior to the enactment of the Sikes Act in 1960, the Service worked with DOD on fisheries management programs to develop recreational fishing opportunities on DOD installations. Passage of the Sikes Act formalized these cooperative efforts and, most importantly, gave Congressional recognition to the significant potential for fish and wildlife management and recreation on DOD lands.

Subsequent amendments have expanded the authority of the Sikes Act to include improving fish and wildlife habitats, protecting threatened and endangered species, and developing multi-use natural resource management plans for military installations. The Sikes Act Improvement Act of 1997 broadened the scope of DOD natural resources programs, integrated natural resources programs with operations and training, embraced the tenets of conservation biology, invited public review, and strengthened funding for conservation activities on military lands. The Act required the development and implementation of Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans (INRMPS) for relevant installations. It requires that INRMPS be prepared in cooperation with the Service and the state fish and wildlife agencies in a truly collaborative process. Where appropriate and applicable, INRMPS must also provide for public access to installations for enjoyment of natural resources. DOD seeks public comments on the plans through provisions in the Act.

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-136) amended the Endangered Species Act to allow exemption of any military installations from Critical Habitat designation if the Secretary of the Interior determines its INRMP provides a benefit to the species for which critical habitat is proposed for designation. In addition, P.L. 108-136 included a pilot program, which required the DOD to include the management of invasive species in its INRMPS on Guam.

As part of the effort to complete all INRMPS for relevant military installations by 2001, the Service and DOD signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on “Ecosystem-Based Management of Fish, Wildlife and Plant Resources on Military Lands.” The MOU established a policy of cooperation and management of living resources on military lands and defined what INRMPS must address. The MOU identified areas where the Service had expertise and the respective roles and responsibilities of the Service and DOD. A revised version of the MOU was signed in January 2006, adding the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) to the parties in the agreement. The revised document emphasizes the cooperative elements of the Sikes Act and encourages the formation of Sikes Act partnership teams and cooperative funding agreements at the National, regional, and installation levels. The MOU also formalizes a Washington Office level interagency working group, called the Sikes Act Core Group (Core Group).

The Core Group works to improve coordination and cooperation among the Sikes Act partner agencies, and it has developed a number of products to achieve this goal. For example, the Core Group helped in the development of draft national Sikes Act guidance to provide consistency between agencies in interpretation and direction for implementation of Sikes Act requirements. The Core Group has also helped the DOD develop annual reporting metrics, which guide the annual evaluation of INRMPS by DOD, the state fish and wildlife agency involved, and the Service. This information is used by the DOD to help improve installation natural resource programs. The Core Group has developed a Sikes Act course for DOD, Service and state personnel to promote the development and implementation of INRMPS through partnership teams. In addition, the Core Group has developed and hosts State Wildlife Action Plan/INRMP Regional Workshops. These workshops pull together representatives from installations, Service field offices and state fish and wildlife agencies to integrate INRMPS with relevant State Wildlife Action Plans and to develop projects that can be supported by cooperative funding strategies.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Roles and Responsibilities Under the Sikes Act

For over 40 years the Service has worked in cooperation with the U.S. military to conserve fish and wildlife resources found on lands owned and managed by the Department of Defense. In implementing its responsibilities under the Sikes Act, the Service focuses on: (1) evaluating the impacts of installation mission and activities on fish and wildlife; (2) ensuring that habitat important to fish and wildlife is taken into consideration in the development of INRMPS; and (3) identifying opportunities to enhance fish and wildlife resources for public benefits while accomplishing the missions of military installations. Several statutes direct our involvement in conservation planning, including the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Service’s work on INRMPS is conducted primarily at the field and regional office levels. Working with state fish and wildlife agencies and DOD, we have been able to achieve significant

accomplishments related to the Sikes Act. For example, at Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia, an MOU was developed among DOD, the Service, and partners in the Rappahannock River area, including The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, the Trust for Public Land, and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, through which three cooperative agreements for land protection were crafted. Since 2005, Fort A.P. Hill has permanently protected over 4,200 acres in the Army Compatible Use Buffer Program. In 2009, the Rappahannock partners were presented with the Secretary of the Interior's Partnerships in Conservation Award for these efforts.

The Naval Base Coronado in California coordinates with the Service and works extensively with government and non-government partners on several conservation programs. The results of the Navy's conservation efforts on and around the base have often exceeded expectations and resulted in increasing plant and animal populations on the installation. One example of this success is of increasing the San Clemente loggerhead shrike population from approximately 13 birds in 1998 to at least 90 breeding age adults in 2007. In addition, under the management of Naval Base Coronado, the California least tern population has increased significantly since 1977, and now comprises approximately 17 percent of the state-wide population.

During the last five years, the Service has spent between \$900,000 and \$4 million of appropriated funds each fiscal year pursuant to the Sikes Act. The Service's expenditures involve providing technical assistance in planning and developing INRMPs; reviewing and processing INRMPs; implementing INRMPs through activities such as population assessment and evaluation, fish stocking, invasive species control, as well as hunting, fishing, and environmental education programs; providing Endangered Species Act consultation; conducting site reviews and interagency meetings; and providing field technical assistance, such as fish and wildlife surveys and habitat assessments and restoration.

Generally, the Service becomes involved in the INRMP process when a draft INRMP is sent to a field office by a military installation for review and comment. When the Service receives an INRMP, we conduct a complete programmatic review of the plan, which includes review by the Endangered Species, Fisheries and Habitat Conservation, National Wildlife Refuges, and Migratory Birds programs. This ensures that the breadth of expertise of Service programs can evaluate whether or not these plans are in compliance with environmental laws administered by the Service.

After comments are exchanged, revisions are made, and agreement is reached (specifically with regard to the conservation, protection, and management of fish and wildlife resources) between a Service field office and a military installation, the INRMP is signed by either a Field Supervisor or the Regional Director.

The Service and state cooperation and coordination with DOD are ongoing processes that extend beyond the agency approval of an INRMP. INRMPs are reviewed by military installations on a yearly basis and our feedback is requested during the review concerning the implementation and effectiveness of the plans. The DOD conducts annual reviews of INRMPs with which the Service cooperates when resources and staff are available. No less frequently than every five years, all three parties to the INRMP complete a formal review of the INRMP. The three parties of the Sikes Act document the outcome of this joint review in a memorandum or letter summarizing the

rationale for the conclusions to reflect the parties' mutual agreement.

Benefits of INRMPs to Fish and Wildlife Resources

The Department of Defense manages approximately 30 million acres of land on over 300 military installations in the United States. Military lands contain rare and unique plant and animal species and native habitats such as old-growth forests, tall-grass prairies, and vernal pool wetlands. Over 400 threatened and endangered species live on DOD-managed lands. Public access to many of these sites is limited due to security and safety concerns; thus they are sheltered from disturbance and development. These lands and the species they support are an essential component of our Nation's biodiversity, and the development, implementation, and improvement of INRMPs supports the long-term health of the habitats supported on military installations.

As a result of the partnerships formed through the Sikes Act, 19 military installations provided over \$2.5 million to the Service and \$1.5 million to the state fish and wildlife agencies to support natural resource conservation work on military installations in fiscal year 2009.

H.R. 5284, the Sikes Act Amendments Act of 2010

Similar to the Administration's proposal for the National Defense Authorization Act of 2011, H.R. 5284 adds state-owned lands supporting Army National Guard facilities to the requirements of INRMPs under the Sikes Act.

In addition, H.R. 5284 would also extend to all military facilities the requirement that the Secretary of Defense include the management of invasive species in their INRMPs. The Department supports HR 5284 but recognizes that a statutory requirement to manage and control invasive species on military lands as a part of INRMPs could be burdensome. The Department supports the management of invasive species with an emphasis on preventing their establishment on military lands. We will be glad to work with the Subcommittee and DOD to ensure that invasive species threats to both fish and wildlife conservation and DOD goals for military lands are minimized.

Conclusion

The Department is proud of its on-going partnership with DOD and the states to conserve living resources on military installations. Through the Sikes Act, the Service, DOD, and the states--through the leadership of the AFWA--have collaborated in natural resource management on military installations, without detracting from the ability of DOD to continue to successfully carry out its missions.

The DOD has been a good steward of living resources and wildlife-associated recreation on military installations. To recognize military installations making extraordinary conservation achievements through its partnership with the Service and the states, the Service created the Military Conservation Partner Award. In March 2010, the Service presented the 6th annual Military Conservation Partner Award to Fort Stewart Military Reservation in Georgia for their work on a variety of fish and wildlife conservation issues including protection of the red-cockaded woodpecker.

The Department looks forward to continued participation and cooperation with the DOD and state

fish and wildlife agencies through the Sikes Act. We will continue our efforts with the military to develop effective INRMPs that are designed to conserve natural resources and promote public access and recreation, while enhancing military preparedness through improved stewardship and sustainability of DOD lands.

Again, the Department appreciates your efforts to reauthorize the Sikes Act, and we look forward to working with the Subcommittee on H.R. 5284 as it continues to move through the committee process. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.