

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

**STATEMENT OF SHERRI W. GOODMAN
DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY) BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES'
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS
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On behalf of Secretary Cohen, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on amendments to the Sikes Act, HR 374.

I would like to thank both committees for your efforts and your willingness to work with us to reauthorize the Sikes Act. I would also like to recognize our partners who are testifying here today. Although there have been certain issues that have prevented us from reaching agreement on the Sikes Act reauthorization sooner, these issues should in no way detract from the tremendous cooperation and success that we have achieved in the past and that I fully expect we will continue to enjoy into the future.

DoD remains very supportive of the need for a strong and up-to-date Sikes Act. We believe certain changes to the existing legislation will reflect the growth of our conservation program and enhance our ability to manage our natural resources in support of the military mission.

DOD'S CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Our Conservation Program includes the sound management of DoD natural and cultural resources to sustain the military mission and protect access to land, air, and water. DoD is one of the nation's largest land managers. The Department requires continued access to its lands to maintain military mission readiness. The land is needed for munitions testing, development of weapon systems, and combat training exercises. Marine and estuarine environments are needed to conduct training exercises, test weapons systems, and conduct shock trials on new ships. Airspace is needed to train pilots and test fighter planes and air-based weapon systems.

When I first testified concerning reauthorization of the Sikes Act soon after coming on board as the new DUSD for Environmental Security, I stated that the Department faced the challenging task of protecting these resources while supporting the military mission. That is still the challenge today. To continue to train and test military capabilities in a realistic and safe manner, DoD must maintain the resources upon which it depends. Our challenge is to balance the use of air, land, and water resources for current military readiness with the need to protect those resources for all desired long- term uses. In order to protect DoD's resources, we are committed to:

- Complying with all applicable laws and standards for the protection of natural resources;
- Identifying all significant and sensitive natural resources;
- Promoting ecosystem-based management on all military lands; and
- Evaluating how well we are managing these natural resources.

In the past four years, we have made great progress toward meeting these commitments. For example, DoD now tracks the completion of resource inventories and the preparation of Integrated Natural and Cultural Resource Management Plans. Integrated planning encourages sustained use of resources and facilitates our resource managers' efforts to support the mission and minimize impacts on the environment. We strongly support integrated planning and are proceeding in this effort even though the current Sikes Act does not require such plans.

DoD's investment in systematic, timely, and integrated planning can result in significant cost avoidance by minimizing the high costs associated with repairs to all land-based resources (e.g., damaged soil, vegetation, wildlife habitats,

archaeological sites, and historic objects.) DoD is on track to meet the goal it set to complete all Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans by the end of FY 2000. Through the end of FY 1996, DoD updated plans at 218 (46 percent) of the 477 military installations requiring such plans. Plans are in place, but still need updating, at an additional 98 installations. Plans are under development at most of the remaining 162 installations.

SIKES ACT AMENDMENTS

The Sikes Act has been a major component of the natural resources portion of DoD's conservation program. For more than 30 years, it has proven instrumental in helping the Department manage its unique natural resources program. Our installations, in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State fish and game agencies, have developed many cooperative fish and wildlife management plans under the Sikes Act. These plans have provided many natural resources initiatives.

Such a strong legacy reaffirms the need for having a broader and more up-to-date Sikes Act. In particular, DoD strongly supports requiring the development and implementation of integrated natural resource management plans for military installations. These plans are the most effective means of ensuring that resource management decisions on DoD lands are based on informed consideration of all relevant factors. As I stated earlier, we are making great progress in the development and implementation of these integrated plans, and amendments to the Sikes Act should reflect this commitment.

We also strongly believe that ultimate responsibility for managing the sensitive natural resources on DoD lands lies with the installation commanders who use those resources. Installation commanders are in the best position to balance the needs of mission accomplishment with natural resource stewardship. We do, however, remain fully committed to working with our partners in this effort.

In an effort to reach agreement on specific language for an up-to-date Sikes Act, we have continued discussions with the Department of Interior (DOI) and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (the International Association). As a result of these discussions, we have reached understanding on the following Sikes Act reauthorization principles:

Sikes Act reauthorization is important to meeting mutual program missions.

- Development of integrated plans should be mandatory for all installations except where not appropriate because of the lack of significant natural resources on a particular installation.
- All issues relating to or that could impact mission preparedness or readiness ultimately must rest with DoD.
- Recognition of the legitimate State authority over fish and wildlife.

We have not, however, reached agreement on specific language to ensure that all parties have an opportunity to participate in plan development.

As a possible alternative, I recently shared, with both DOI and the International Association, a proposal that would allow the development of integrated natural resource management plans in cooperation with DOI and the appropriate State agency so that these plans individually respond to their concerns regarding fish and wildlife management. Our proposal also includes a reaffirmation of State authorities at each military installation. Such cooperation would be based on a process outlined in a mutually agreed upon Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the three parties, rather than on statutory requirements. If determined to be necessary and desirable, such an MOU could include a process that would allow either DOI or the State agency the opportunity to seek reconsideration of installation-level decisions by more senior Department officials. I am hopeful that this proposal will move us closer to reaching consensus.

We have several minor technical comments on other sections of the proposed legislation. For example, certain of the responsibilities currently assigned to the Secretary of Defense can be delegated to the Secretaries of the Military Departments, and the use of cooperative agreements to implement integrated natural resource management plans could

be further explained. We would be happy to work with your staff to identify and correct these and any other technical concerns.

I would like to highlight briefly a few other conservation initiatives. These demonstrate the type of cooperative partnerships that DoD has used to provide adequate protection and use of its natural resources, and appropriate integration with other State and Federal natural resources management efforts.

Ecosystem Management Policy and Initiatives

DoD has adopted an ecosystem approach to managing its natural resources. This approach considers groups of plant and animal species and their interrelationships instead of focusing on single-species management. It promotes the use of benchmarks and the best available science, as well as sustainable use for both human and ecological purposes. It also encourages managers to monitor the effects of management actions and make corrective adaptations.

A recent study, *Biodiversity and Landscape Planning: Alternative Futures for the Region of Camp Pendleton, California*, demonstrates the challenges of planning future military activities at a heavily used installation in an area of intense development, and the applicability of ecosystem-wide planning in this context. The study examined various types of development and the consequent stresses on native habitats and biodiversity. Given its location and its quantity of undeveloped land, Camp Pendleton is central to maintaining the long-term biodiversity of the region. Camp Pendleton plays a key role in the connectivity of the region's ecosystems, and over the long-term, faces the risk of becoming a habitat island for species. Camp Pendleton is also the only facility on the west coast where Marines can practice amphibious assaults. Camp Pendleton's resource managers are showing that a regional perspective is necessary if a true ecological approach is to be achieved, and that an ecological approach to natural resources management enhances the installation's long-term readiness. This study is helping Pendleton identify and work with surrounding landowners to achieve the best regional solutions to very complex issues.

Mojave Desert Ecosystem Initiative

DoD is applying the principles of ecosystem management on a regional scale in the Mojave Desert, DoD's premier training and testing region. Located in the area are such major installations as National Training Center (NTC) Fort Irwin, Marine Corps Ground Combat Center Twenty-nine Palms, Edwards AFB, and Naval Air Weapons Center China Lake. DoD conducts most of its large-scale unit training exercises and major weapons testing in this area. DoD also protects many important natural and cultural resources in the desert and has significant interest in its long-term sustainability.

In FY 1996, DoD continued work to create an integrated geographical information system (GIS) that will provide bibliographic information and enhanced GIS data layers to land managers in the desert. DoD is working cooperatively with the Department of the Interior (DOI) and its Desert Managers' Group, comprised of DOI's Desert Land Managers and Park Superintendents, on this project.

The Mojave Initiative is important for several reasons: it provides uniform data coverage across an entire ecoregion; it is a model for sharing data by a varied group of participants for the purpose of ecosystem management; and, most importantly, DoD can use the data for integrated planning and decision-making. By identifying resource conditions and restrictions in a comprehensive, regional context, DoD can take appropriate actions to manage areas critical both for military training and habitat management. This ecosystem approach can help prevent DoD lands from becoming "eco-islands." It is in the interest of both military mission flexibility and long-term habitat survivability to encourage this broad ecosystem approach.

Biodiversity Initiative

Biodiversity - the variety of life and the ecological processes that sustain it - is critical to the integrity and sustainability of ecosystems. Hence, biodiversity conservation is a central component of ecosystem management. Biodiversity conservation also is essential to sustaining the natural landscapes required for the training and testing necessary to maintain military readiness.

In FY 1996, DoD completed a joint partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the Keystone Center to develop a strategy to conserve biodiversity on military lands. In a major national policy dialogue, more than 60 military trainers/operators, natural resource managers, Federal and State agency representatives, and private sector interests discussed the importance of biodiversity conservation on military lands and how to integrate it successfully with requirements of the military mission. The Initiative produced three major documents:

- A Keystone Center Policy Dialogue on a DoD Biodiversity Management Strategy. This report contains recommendations for managing biodiversity conservation activities on military lands. It explicitly recognizes that biodiversity conservation is essential to sustaining the natural landscapes required for the training and testing necessary to maintain military readiness.
- A DoD Commander's Guide to Biodiversity. This brochure provides key DoD decision-makers with a summary of the importance of biodiversity conservation, and how it can be successfully integrated with military mission requirements.
- A Handbook for Natural Resource Managers: Conserving Biodiversity on Military Lands. The Handbook provides DoD natural resource managers with background information and practical guidance to practice biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management.

This Initiative represents the new generation of resource stewardship that allows military operators and natural resource managers to find solutions that optimize both operational and natural resource management objectives. The Initiative will greatly facilitate DoD's efforts to implement a consistent approach to managing its vast resources.

Migratory Bird Studies

The Department is a major partner in the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Program, better known as the Partners-In-Flight (PIF) Program. As one of over 150 Federal, State, and nongovernmental partners, DoD has invested significant resources in the PIF program to protect neotropical migratory birds and their habitat. With the use of weather radar systems, we are able to pinpoint important stopover sites on DoD lands. These steppingstones of habitat on DoD installations are critical to migratory birds as they move between the Americas each spring and fall. These same radar systems may also facilitate the development of a system to warn military pilots of potential bird aircraft collisions, which cause millions of dollars of damage to military aircraft each year. It is our objective to protect the habitat of these birds, many of which are in danger of becoming threatened or endangered, to avoid potential future restrictions on our operations.

DoD uses a satellite-based tracking system to track species of concern such as the Swainson's hawk. Hawk movements were tracked over the Orchard Training Area, Idaho, to identify potential conflicts with military mission needs. A second phase of the study tracked hawks to their wintering grounds in Argentina. A field check of locations identified by satellite data has shown that recent nesting population declines are partially attributable to pesticide poisoning in South America. Information such as this provides DoD with indicators of population declines which can be used to determine whether land management strategies must be altered on our installations, or if population declines are attributable to some other factors outside our boundaries.

Land Management Planning

The Army's Integrated Training Area Management (ITAM) and the Marine Corps' Long-Term Ecological Trend Management Program are good examples of how DoD is meeting the challenges of protecting training resources through planning and conservation. These programs integrate military training, testing, and other mission requirements with the condition of the land and its ability to support mission requirements. For example, at Fort Sill, OK, land managers use ITAM to plan training activities on the open grassland prairie that provides ideal training grounds for tracked vehicles and troop maneuvers.

By using data collected through ITAM, managers are able to rotate training on 80 sites susceptible to deterioration with prolonged use. Rotations allow land managers to apply corrective conservation measures to sites that are stressed by heavy use. Rest and rotation are also used to eliminate trails and vegetation gaps caused by prior exercises, providing

the best and widest variety of training conditions.

ITAM allows dozens of military units, using some 2,000 tactical vehicles, to conduct maneuvers at Fort Sill 345 days a year. This approach helps trainers to determine land-carrying capacity and the frequency of training that may occur without damage. The benefits include increased training realism, reduced costs for environmental compliance and restoration, and a continued high level of military readiness and land stewardship.

Outdoor Recreation Management

DoD installations provide varied outdoor recreational opportunities. Many are open to public use. Fishing and hunting programs are major components of many installations' outdoor recreation opportunities. Extensive efforts are undertaken to protect and enhance these resources.

DoD participates in the Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan. In 1996, the Military Departments conserved, enhanced, or restored more than 910 miles of shoreline habitat and 66,500 acres of aquatic habitat, and issued almost 96,000 installation fishing permits. At least 104 DoD installations had public outreach and education programs for recreational fishing.

User fees are applied to specific projects such as nature trails, elevated boardwalks, dock construction, and fish stocking, or to more general conservation programs.

We are currently working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a new Memorandum of Understanding on the management of fish, wildlife, and plant resources on military lands. In addition, we hope to establish master agreements with Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the National Audubon Society within the next few months.

We have not achieved these successes alone. Important to our achievement has been our coordination and partnership efforts. Clearly, the efforts facilitated under the existing authorities of the Sikes Act reflect some of our best efforts.

CONCLUSION

A strong environmental program is an integral component of a strong defense - and a strong Defense Department. DoD has an environmental program that protects our troops and families, manages our training and living areas carefully, fulfills our obligations to be good citizens and neighbors, and sets a good example to other militaries around the world. Secretary Cohen said it best, "Environmental protection is critical to the Defense Department mission, and environmental considerations shall be incorporated into all defense activities."

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