

# Committee on Resources

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## Witness Testimony

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**STATEMENT OF  
RICHARD E. GRIFFITHS  
PRESIDENT  
NATIONAL MILITARY FISH AND WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS  
(H.R. 374)  
MAY 22, 1997**

Good morning Mr. Chairman, committee members. As President of the National Military Fish and Wildlife Association, I thank the members of these committees for the opportunity to testify regarding the Sikes Act Improvement Amendments of 1997 (H.R. 374) and its importance to the management of natural resources on the military lands of the United States. I also wish to specifically thank Congressman Young and Congressman Saxton for their sponsorship of this legislation.

The National Military Fish and Wildlife Association is an organization whose mission is to promote professional natural resource management on military lands. Our membership includes over 700 military and civilian natural resources managers in all four of the Armed Services as well as National Guard and Reserve components and the Coast Guard. These biologists, foresters, land managers, agronomists, natural resources specialists and others are responsible for professional management of fish, wildlife, soils, forests, rangeland, outdoor recreation (e.g., hunting, fishing, trapping, camping, wildlife viewing, mountain biking and other off-road vehicle use, etc.), threatened and endangered species habitat, and all other programs that relate to conservation of the natural resources on over 25 million acres of Department of Defense (DoD) lands in support of the military mission. The National Guard components manage many additional millions of acres. Although often overlooked, the Department of Defense is third largest land and natural resource managing agency of the Federal Government (after the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture).

Our soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen require the most natural and realistic conditions available if they are to develop into the World's premier fighting force. They depend on us to provide the training and testing environment that will fulfill this need. If we are to sustain training on the lands we currently have, we cannot allow the land to be denuded of vegetation or become so severely eroded that it cannot be traversed by mechanized equipment. It is unrealistic to expect optimum training on neglected land. Likewise, it is unrealistic to expect that the Defense Department can acquire new, undamaged lands to replace those damaged beyond repair.

Installations with well-planned natural resource management programs have been able to maintain the quality of the natural resources on their training lands and provide for restoration of impacted areas. However, they will continue to do so only as long as they have professional natural resource managers and the necessary funding to successfully manage these lands and restore them when they are damaged. It is important to note that it costs less to develop plans that provide for appropriate integration of natural resource management and the military mission than it does to repair resources after they have been degraded by misuse or neglect.

H.R. 374, the Sikes Act Improvement Amendments of 1997 represent over four years effort by Congress, the Departments of Defense and the Interior, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the National Military fish and Wildlife Association and other stakeholders. The National Military Fish and Wildlife Association looks forward to final passage of this important legislation. During its annual training workshop and business meeting in March, 1997, the Association passed a resolution urging the parties that have an interest in the Act to work together for passage of the 1997 Sikes Act Improvement Amendments during this session of Congress. A copy of this

resolution, which was sent to the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, is included at the end of this statement.

Although our present Cooperative Plans have served us well, the requirement that the Department of Defense shall prepare and implement Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans recognizes the need for expanding them beyond management of fish and wildlife to encompass all natural resources. Our Association commends Ms. Goodman and her staff for their recent publication of DoD Instruction 4715.3 Environmental Conservation which provides direction to installations on how to develop and implement their individual Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans.

Our Association feels that mutual agreement is critical for those portions of the integrated plan that cover fish and wildlife. Signed, tri-party agreements have been a feature of the Sikes Act since 1964. We continue to support the requirement for signatures from both agencies with statutory authority over fish and wildlife resources.

The Association will support language to the effect that the fish and wildlife portion of the plan, formerly covered by 'Cooperative Agreements', shall remain subject to Fish and Wildlife Service and State conservation agency concurrence. However, the entire plan need not be subject to concurrence or approval by these agencies since the amendments will require implementation of the plan in order to meet its management goals, objectives, and time-frames for proposed actions. The provision for public comment will allay/satisfy public concerns for the way DoD manages its lands by giving the public a chance to be heard and to be a part of the planning process.

Authorizing Department of Defense installations to collect, spend, administer, and account for the hunting, fishing and trapping fees collected by them will simplify the handling and expending of these fees. It represents an improvement upon the present system whereby such fees are collected on the installations but spending authority must be requested from their Major Command (or higher). The current system has resulted in a significant accumulation of fees on some installations that could be used for fish and wildlife enhancement except that full utilization of these funds has never been authorized.

The amendment in Section 6 of H.R. 374 provides the specific authority necessary to enable properly trained Department of Defense personnel to enforce all federal laws relating to the conservation of natural and cultural resources and the environment on Department of Defense installations. Authority for enforcement of natural resource laws is important. Currently, our trained employees lack clear natural resources law enforcement authority as agents of the Defense Department. In some jurisdictions, our personnel must obtain state and/or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognition in order to exercise full law enforcement authority.

Redefining military installation to include National Guard lands, Reserve component lands and all "temporary" military land withdrawals in excess of five years clarifies the intent of Congress with respect to these lands.

The change from "matching basis" to "cost-sharing basis" without a specific matching requirement will allow for unequal contributions and permit needed flexibility in executing joint projects. This change will allow a partner to contribute more than 50 percent of the funding for a project or permit three or more unequal partners to participate in a single project.

The Association supports the provision for ensuring public access to natural resource based recreation on Department of Defense lands to the extent that it does not conflict with the military mission. Such recreation is an important component of our American heritage. As our population grows, demand for hunting, fishing, camping, bird watching and other natural resource dependent recreation will also increase. Military lands can provide an alternative to the traditional opportunities afforded by our National Parks, Forests and Wildlife Refuges.

The Association strongly supports the intention of Congress that "...sufficient numbers of professionally trained natural resource management personnel and natural resource law enforcement personnel are available and assigned ..." to implement this Act and each Installation's Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan. However, we suggest that the Committee consider clarifying "sufficient numbers of professionally trained ....personnel". A recent interpretation of the Sikes Act by some Commands is that only enough professional personnel to supervise contractors are actually required.

We believe, as expressed in an earlier reauthorization of the Sikes Act, that natural resource management is an inherently Governmental function. Efforts to contract natural resource management on Department of Defense lands appear to be in opposition to the intent of Congress. Congress has specifically stated that the Federal cost comparison process may not be used to procure natural resource management services and that priority for contracting these services on military lands should be given to other governmental conservation agencies.

The Association is concerned that a current Air Force review of outsourcing possibilities will overlook the problems that can be incurred when certain natural resource management functions are contracted. The Association's greatest concern is the quality of management that the natural resources may receive. This concern is based on our personal experiences with contracted services. It is possible to prepare and oversee contracts for many of the less complex services needed on military installations (e.g., trash collection or vehicle maintenance). However, natural resource management is a complex and dynamic business.

While contractors can perform many tasks, they require close supervision, and, unlike Department of Defense natural resource managers, tend to adhere closely to the work requirements specified in their contracts. If something outside their contract needs to be done, there is often no simple way to ask them to do more or even amend their contracts without re-opening the procurement process. Contractors frequently employ field personnel with limited experience. Often, these personnel are unable to spend the time in the field that is required to become intimately familiar with an installation's natural resources. Such intimate knowledge and a commitment to the resource, is essential to making sound management decisions.

Installations with well-planned natural resource management programs have been able to maintain the quality of the natural resources on their training lands and provide for restoration of impacted areas. However, they will continue to do so only as long as they have professional natural resource managers and the necessary funding to successfully manage these lands and restore them if they are damaged.

Regardless of the final language in the Act, the natural resources on each installation must be managed to support the military mission of that installation. National Military Fish and Wildlife Association members believe that this can best be accomplished through Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans developed and implemented by professional natural resource managers.

The National Military Fish and Wildlife Association firmly believes that the Sikes Act Improvement Amendments of 1997 represent a significant step forward in the evolution of the Sikes Act.

The Association and I will be happy to answer questions and otherwise assist you in any way we can with this vital legislation.

Thank you.

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