

TESTIMONY OF MATT J. HOGAN, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE AND PARKS, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, REGARDING H.R. 5539, REAUTHORIZATION OF THE "NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION ACT".

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am Matt Hogan, Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, at the Department of the Interior. I am pleased to be here today to testify in support of H.R.5539, reauthorization of the "North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 2006". The Administration strongly supports this legislation and the ongoing efforts of the NAWCA program and Congress to conserve, restore, and protect wetlands and the wildlife dependent on them.

The Department greatly appreciates the Committee's continuing interest in conserving wetlands and associated habitats, and recognizing the tremendous value and success of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), originally passed in 1989. Over the past 15 years we have witnessed remarkable achievements in conservation through this landmark legislation, which promotes strong partnerships to protect and restore habitat for migratory birds, endangered species, and a host of other fauna and flora. These partnerships are established with world-renowned nongovernmental conservation organizations, State fish and wildlife agencies, and numerous grass-roots organizations focused in small geographic areas.

The NAWCA program provides matching grants to organizations and individuals who have developed partnerships to carry out wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. NAWCA was originally passed, in part, to support activities under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international partnership agreement that provides a comprehensive strategy for the long-term protection of wetlands and associated uplands habitat needed by waterfowl and other migratory birds in North America, enjoyed by more than 49 million Americans annually. The NAWCA program is also widely recognized for its support of other bird conservation plans, including Partners in Flight, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, and U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, all of which emphasize the importance of habitat conservation. The program's connection to these conservation plans was formalized in the 2002 reauthorization of NAWCA.

As Congress previously found, the maintenance of healthy populations of migratory birds in North America is dependent on the protection, restoration, and management of wetland ecosystems and associated habitats in the United States as well as in Canada and Mexico. Conversely, wetlands destruction, loss of nesting cover, and degradation of migration and wintering habitat have contributed to previous long-term downward trends in populations of migratory bird species. Studies have shown that habitat restoration and enhancement projects funded through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act can improve the nesting success and survival of waterfowl and other migratory birds.

NAWCA projects are wide-ranging and varied. For example, the North San Joaquin Valley Wetland Habitat Project restored or enhanced over 35,000 acres of wetlands in California's Central Valley by installing water control structures, improving water delivery systems, and de-leveling agricultural fields, among other activities. Working with state and private partners who provided more than \$2 million in match, the California Waterfowl Association used this \$1 million NAWCA grant to improve habitat on seven private and one state-owned property. An estimated 60% of the Pacific Flyway's waterfowl population either winter in or migrate through the Central Valley.

NAWCA grants also address breeding habitat, such as the series of projects in the Missouri Coteau in North Dakota. Multiple grants have been provided to acquire easements in this most valuable prairie pothole region, allowing continued private use of the land, while preserving small wetlands and associated uplands necessary for waterfowl, shorebird, and other migratory bird breeding populations.

Of course, NAWCA wetland projects also provide long-term side benefits beyond bird habitat. For example, in the Cameron Creole Watershed of the Mississippi Delta, Ducks Unlimited used a NAWCA grant to build winged terraces. While these help provide habitat, they also demonstrated their worth when Hurricane Katrina hit the area last fall. The terraces not only survived the storm, but captured much of the marsh that had been uprooted elsewhere.

NAWCA plays an integral role in the President's commitment to move beyond "no net loss" of wetlands and attain an overall increase in the amount and quality of wetlands in America. Since Earth Day 2004 when President Bush described his goal for restoring, improving, and protecting 3 million additional wetland acres by 2009, 1,797,000 acres have been restored, created, protected, or improved. In cooperation with its partners, the NAWCA program is anticipated to further this goal during fiscal years 2006 and 2007 by creating or restoring approximately 185,000 acres, improving approximately 304,000 acres, and protecting approximately 876,000 acres. For fiscal year 2007, the President has requested \$41.6 million for NAWCA, showing a continuing support for this essential conservation tool.

One of the important features of NAWCA is the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, a group that reviews and recommends projects for approval by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission. The strength of the Council comes from its diverse membership, composed of the Director of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, four directors of State Fish and Wildlife agencies representing each of the four migratory bird flyways, and non-profit organizations actively involved in habitat conservation. The Council has been widely viewed as a leader in international habitat conservation activities through their implementation of NAWCA.

In addition to funding authorized for NAWCA by Congress, funding for NAWCA comes from three separate sources. First, monies received from fines, penalties, and forfeitures under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 are directed to NAWCA. Second, interest accrued on the fund established under the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937 is directed to NAWCA. Just last year P.L. 109-75 extended this provision until 2016. Third, under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950, a portion of the Federal fuel excise taxes on small gasoline engines are allocated to NAWCA for coastal ecosystem projects. Over the past four years, an annual average of \$75 million has been available from all sources, an amount that meets many identified needs. In fiscal year 2006, 129 projects are being funded with almost \$69 million in NAWCA funds and another \$216 million in partner support, including approximately \$144 million in obligated matching funds.

From fiscal years 1991 through 2006, more than 2,500 unique partners have been involved in 1,243 NAWCA Standard Grant program projects, which can be eligible for up to \$1 million in grant monies. Under the Small Grants program, which has provided grants of \$50,000 or less since their inception ten years ago, 332 projects have been awarded over \$14 million in NAWCA funds with over \$98 million in total partner contributions. As a whole, more than \$720 million total has been awarded through the Act, and total partner contributions have amounted to more than \$2.1 billion. With these funds, almost 23 million acres of wetlands and associated uplands have been protected, restored, or enhanced in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Each Federal dollar provided by the NAWCA has been combined with nearly three dollars from other sources, and in fact has leveraged just over two dollars in obligated matching funds, well above the minimum one-to-one match. We believe that is a significant, and wise, Federal investment.

The key to NAWCA's accomplishments is the collaborative efforts that it fosters. Project proposals are developed through local partnerships, basing their objectives on the bird conservation goals and information created on a continental scale using the best science available. These proposals are reviewed by a Council of partners, and judged on their ability to address established conservation goals for migratory birds and wildlife resources.

In 2002, Congress reauthorized appropriations for the Act through fiscal year 2007, reflecting Congress' and the public's support of NAWCA's goals. H.R. 5539 will maintain the authorized funding level at \$75 million and will extend authorization for the Act through fiscal year 2011. We support this bill without reservation and look forward to continuing to administer this outstanding program that has an impressive history of accomplishment for both the American people and the wildlife it treasures.