

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, as you know, our country is facing a growing challenge to conserve our nation's remaining wetlands. More than 50 percent of our nation's wetlands have been lost, and in some states the loss is as high as 90 percent – a devastating loss for waterfowl and wildlife habitat. In my home state of Minnesota more than 10,000 wetland acres have been lost just in the past decade.

Needless to say, this situation requires the attention of Congress. That is why I'm proud to stand with Chairman Pombo as an original cosponsor of his bill to reauthorize the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) for an additional five years.

Since 1989, NAWCA has partnered with over 3,000 individuals and organizations to conserve more than 20 million acres of wetlands and other critical wildlife habitat. Congress has appropriated nearly \$750 million in federal grants that have been matched by more than \$2.3 billion in contributions from sportsmen, state wildlife agencies, conservationists and landowners.

In my home state of Minnesota, this program has provided nearly \$90 million in federal grants and matching contributions for the conservation of over 125,000 acres of wetlands and wildlife habitat.

NAWCA has been essential for providing the focus that is needed to improve our lakes and rivers and to re-establish habitat that is critical for wildlife to survive and thrive. It is my hope that with the kind of strong bipartisan support that we see here today, we will quickly pass this legislation and enact it into law.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to talk about another bipartisan bill which also adopts the public-private partnership approach – the Wetlands Loan Act, which builds on the current Federal Duck Stamp program, the oldest and most successful conservation program in our country.

The Federal Duck Stamp program is largely paid for by sportsmen and women. However, because the number of hunters in the U.S. has remained relatively static while the price of land is on the rise, it is becoming increasingly difficult to purchase the necessary lands to preserve the habitat needed for wildlife production.

For example, in Pope County, Minnesota, the price of land has increased from \$400/acre in 1991 to \$1,462/acre in 2004, a 266 percent increase. This has led to an almost 50 percent decline in the number of acres acquired for wetlands conservation since 1992. This is a situation that we cannot tolerate if we want future generations to continue to enjoy the great outdoors.

That's why I have introduced, along with Congressman Mike Thompson, H.R. 4315, the Emergency Wetlands Loan Act. The bill would increase resources for wetlands conservation by reauthorizing the Wetlands Loan Act at \$400 million over the next 10 years.

The bill is narrowly aimed at wetlands conservation and as such, it includes an incremental increase in the price of the duck stamp that is explicitly tied to the repayment of the loan without disrupting critical funding for the duck stamp program.

This is a fiscally responsible approach that is built around landowner rights, flexibility and a targeted focus on waterfowl habitat conservation. That is why H.R. 4315 has won the support of 94 of our colleagues and nearly 30 sportsmen and conservation organizations.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. Conserving our wetlands and wildlife habitat is a priority in my state of Minnesota and throughout the country. We need to have responsible, commonsense solutions to problems like the declining conservation of waterfowl habitat. The legislation we discuss here today is just such a solution.

I look forward to answering any questions you or the Subcommittee members may have.