

TESTIMONY OF JEFF C. NEAL, OKLAHOMA LANDOWNER, TULSA, OKLAHOMA, BEFORE THE
CHAIRMAN OF THE FISHERIES AND OCEANS SUBCOMMITTEE, REP. WAYNE T. GILCHREST,
REGARDING PARTNERS FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to discuss my involvement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

I first became involved with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in 2001.

My wife, Jennifer, and I purchased a 1,220 acre ranch along a five mile stretch of the South Canadian River.

The Neal Ranch is located in Pittsburg County along the South Canadian River. Our property is located just to the west of Lake Eufaula - Oklahoma's largest reservoir.

After we purchased the land we needed a lot of technical assistance to maximize our land for wildlife. I contacted the Partners for Fish and Wildlife officials in Tulsa.

They have worked with me by providing the technical assistance, advised me of other state and federal conservation programs and provided cost-share funding for wetland restoration and native grass restoration. Without Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, it would not be as productive for my family needs and the wildlife resource that now lives on my ranch.

I have also been involved with other government programs since owning my ranch.

But none have compared with the cooperation and one-on-one assistance I have experienced with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. I think the reason that the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is very successful are the people that the Fish and Wildlife Service has hired that go out and meet with landowners on a one-on-one basis.

This is where the war is either won or lost is the one-on-one contact and that's the real benefit of the Partners Program.

Our restored and enhanced wetlands have increased the biodiversity for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds and other wetland dependent wildlife species. We see river otters frequently and have a pair of nesting Bald Eagles and a good population of endangered Least Terns nesting on the Canadian River.

When we purchased the property it had 250 cows grazing, therefore, it was eroded and damaged by the cattle and their unsupervised grazing. We got the cows off and immediately began working with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program. During the first two years we owned the property, we rarely saw evidence of much wildlife.

Since the Partners Program has assisted with the development of the dikes and the planting of a 120 acre native grass area, we now see a lot of deer, turkey, quail, but most plentifully waterfowl and shorebirds.

For instance, most any given day in the fall, winter and spring seasons one can expect to see hundreds of migrating Ducks, Geese, and large flocks of American white Pelicans, herd's of deer, flocks of turkey and quail.

Before the help of the Partners program the areas that now hold these species were beat down and over grazed fields.

Conservation, preservation and maintaining habitat for wildlife isn't something new to me.

I have enjoyed a career of 30 years in the international hunting industry and have had the opportunity to witness all kinds of lands worldwide that maintain populations of wildlife.

My belief is if we don't create habitat and maintain it there will be no future in America for our wildlife. As human population soars, wildlife loses.

As I have witnessed in most of the African and European countries that still has wild and unfenced wildlife, the only reason they have this is because they have provided good habitat, food source and, most of all, good management and supervision.

In the United States that management and supervision on private lands is provided by landowners. This is why the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is so important.

The Partner's Program provides a true volunteer partnership program that restores, creates and protects wildlife habitat in a partnership between the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners Program and the landowner which leads to a Win – Win situation.

Thank you,

Jeff C. Neal

