

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE JIM SAXTON, CHAIRMAN,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS,
AT THE OVERSIGHT HEARING ON
THE FY'01 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE:
MARCH 23, 2000.

Good morning. Today we will hear from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on its budget priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. I have noted with interest that the Administration is seeking a \$250 million increase in those Fish and Wildlife Service accounts subject to annual appropriations. I look forward to hearing a justification on why this increase is necessary.

Specifically, I support the additional \$20 million that the Service has requested for the operation of our National Wildlife Refuge System. This vibrant network of 93 million acres, which is comprised of 521 individual units, will soon celebrate its 100th anniversary. It is essential that it be adequately funded.

I am also pleased that the Service has requested \$30 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund. This program has been hugely successful in conserving millions of acres of essential wetland and upland habitats in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. It is my understanding that as a result of this increase, which I urged some three years ago, 235,000 additional acres of wetlands will be enhanced.

In addition, I enthusiastically endorse the recommendation that \$1.3 million be provided to conserve neotropical migratory birds and that \$3 million be allocated for the African Elephant, Asian Elephant, and Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Funds.

Finally, I am sympathetic to the financial difficulties that the Law Enforcement Division has experienced over the past few years, and I am anxious to hear how their \$12 million budget increases will be spent. It is my hope that at least some of these funds will be used to stop the importation of products containing rhino and tiger parts, and that existing products will be removed from the shelves of pharmacies in this nation.

On a negative note, I was disappointed to see that the Administration has asked for less money for refuge maintenance, ESA recovery efforts, and the National Wildlife Refuge Fund.

For three years, I have worked diligently with Congressional appropriators and the CARE group to obtain increased Federal support to reduce the staggering maintenance backlog facing our Refuge System. We have made a great deal of progress in this effort. However, there is still a \$779 million backlog in various projects and this is **NOT** the time to reverse course.

Finally, I would like to hear more about the newly proposed \$100 million State Non-Game Wildlife Grants Fund and the Service's plan to realign the various divisions within the agency. I would like to welcome the distinguished Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to our Subcommittee. I am confident that we will have a productive year together and will produce legislation, like the Arctic Tundra Habitat Emergency Conservation Act, that will be beneficial to this nation.

#####

