

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS,
OCEANS AND WILDLIFE ON HR 5284, SIKES ACT AMENDMENTS OF 2010
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Thank you, Madam Chair. I am Gary Taylor, Legislative Director of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and I'm here today to share with you the support of the Association for HR 5284, clarifying the Sikes Act as it applies to Army National Guard installations. The Association applauds the significant progress for fish and wildlife conservation that has been made through the cooperation of the Department of Defense (DoD) installations, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and State fish and wildlife agencies since the passage of the Sikes Act Improvement Act in 1997. We can all be proud of the conservation benefits achieved from this often unknown and unheralded success story of public lands management on approximately 30 Million acres. Our successes have certainly substantiated that not only is achievement of the military preparedness mission and sound stewardship of the land and its fish and wildlife resources not mutually exclusive, they are indeed mutually necessary and beneficial.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, founded in 1902, is the collective voice of North America's fish and wildlife agencies. All 50 States plus Guam, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico are members. The Association provides its member agencies and their senior staff with coordination services that range from migratory birds, fish habitat conservation, and invasive species, to conservation education, leadership development, and international relations. The Association represents its state agency members before Congress and the Administration on key conservation and management policies, and works to ensure that all fish and wildlife entities work collaboratively on the most important issues.

The 1997 amendments to the Sikes Act, which provide for enhanced management of fish, wildlife and recreational resources on military installations, remain of great importance to state fish and wildlife agencies. States have primary management responsibility and authority for fish and wildlife resources found within state borders, including on most public lands.

The opportunity for management of fish and wildlife resources on military installations has always existed, and the state fish and wildlife agencies have generally enjoyed very good working relationships with military installations where, historically, conservation work was accomplished under an MOU executed between the state, and the military installation, and often included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The 1997 Sikes Act Improvement Act amendments mandated that these fish and wildlife resources be managed for the benefit of the public, the natural resources of the installation, and in cooperation with those responsible for management of the surrounding land areas. The principal means of doing this is through the development and implementation of the Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans (INRMPs) through the cooperation of the DoD installation, USFWS and respective State fish and wildlife agency. With respect to the fish and wildlife conservation provisions of INRMPs, the Act compels mutual agreement of the 3 statutory partners. The Sikes Act was intended to assure continued and active participation and cooperation with state fish and wildlife agencies for all

phases of fish and wildlife management on military installations, from planning and design to implementation and monitoring of the plans.

The many exemplary installations on which INRMPs embody the Congressional intent and direction in the Sikes Act are most often the result of early and excellent cooperation between the 3 statutory parties, adequate funding to the respective agencies, and the availability of professional staff in the 3 agencies with the capacity to devote to fulfilling the INRMP objectives. I can firmly assure you of the commitment of the State fish and wildlife agencies to cooperating with DoD and the USFWS to advance fish, wildlife and habitat conservation on military installations.

We support HR5284 because it clarifies what we believe was originally intended, and that is the need for and application of INRMPS on, and funding eligibility for, Army National Guard bases where significant natural resources exist, and which installations are held under state title. Army National Guard bases are dedicated to fulfilling the military preparedness mission, and like other military installations, have historically worked closely with the state fish and wildlife agencies to enhance installation natural resource conservation.

Camp Grayling in northern Michigan is illustrative of both the need and success of this relationship. One of the largest National Guard training bases in the country, Camp Grayling is almost 150,000 acres located largely on land held in title by the State of Michigan. It routinely accommodates National Guard training not only from Michigan but from surrounding states. Camp Grayling works closely with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Environment on sustaining the quality of habitat for fish, wildlife and other natural resources. Much of Camp Grayling is accessible to the public for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation activities. The Michigan National Guard and Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Environment cooperate through the INRMP on several high profile projects, including:

- Pine Barrens management plan: a cooperative effort to restore this rare ecosystem, through inventories of fauna and flora, and implementation of management actions to restore function to this ecosystem.
- Mutual aid for fire suppression.
- Jointly conducted Kirtland's warbler census including identification of warbler habitat and active management where it exists, and discouraging habitat where it doesn't exist in order to minimize conflict with the military mission.
- An assessment of high quality natural areas on Camp Grayling revealed the presence of several invasive species, including phragmites and spotted knapweed. A special weed action team was deployed from Fort Custer, another Michigan National Guard facility which is federally owned, to eradicate these species and monitor success.

In many of our states, our agencies also provide access to state owned wildlife management areas, state forests or other lands, for Army National Guard training exercises, in exchange for which the Army National Guard will assist our agencies in conservation projects that require heavy equipment or significant manpower.

With respect to expanding the pilot program regarding invasive species, currently available only to Guam, we agree with the premise of the program that prevention and robust interdiction is the best and most effective measure to deal with invasive species. We also agree that management of invasive species on military installations should be included in the development of INRMPs, with actions subject to consideration of the 3 statutory partners. I believe it is fair to observe that many INRMPs and certainly those for installations with invasive species problems likely have an invasive species aspect already.

In conclusion, the state fish and wildlife agencies greatly value the relationship that they enjoy under the Sikes Act with the military installations and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as we collaborate on meeting fish and wildlife conservation objectives. Military installations are vital to our national security, but they also contribute significantly to the conservation of our Nation's natural resources. In the face of landscape level challenges such as energy development, urban growth, and climate change, these installations will be increasingly important and integral to our fish, wildlife and habitat conservation efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent the Association's perspectives, and I would be pleased to answer any questions.