



The voice of fish and wildlife agencies

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**Oral Testimony of:**

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**Representing the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies,  
Washington, D.C.**

**Legislative Hearing before the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
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Good morning, Chairman Bentz, Ranking Member Huffman, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I am Bob Caccese, Director of Policy, Planning and Communications for the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Today I am representing the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association). Our mission is to protect the authorities of our member agencies and enhance their abilities to manage fish and wildlife as public trust resources for current and future generations. All 50 states are members as well as the U.S. Virgin Islands and the District of Columbia.

My testimony focuses on H.R. 5009, the *Wildlife Innovation and Longevity Driver Reauthorization Act*, or *WILD Act*, but I wanted to mention that the Association also supports H.R. 4389, the *Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act* as well. Both are important programs that deliver tangible conservation outcomes.

**H.R. 5009, “WILD Act”**

I would like to thank Congressman Dave Joyce and Congresswoman Debbie Dingell for introducing the *WILD Act*. This bipartisan legislation would reauthorize critical U.S. Fish and Wildlife conservation programs. Specifically, it would reauthorize the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, which enables wildlife and habitat conservation in all 50 states and territories, and the Multinational Species Conservation Funds, which help conserve some of the world’s most iconic species, including rhinos, elephants, tigers, great apes, and turtles.

While the Association supports the bill in its entirety, I will focus my testimony on the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners Program) as that is where my expertise is most applicable. H.R. 5009 reauthorizes the Partners Program through fiscal year 2028 and its enactment is a critical priority of the Association as the program is set to expire this year.

Since its inception in 1987, the Partners Program has enabled restoration of more than six million acres of habitat by bringing together state, federal, tribal, and private partners. Last year alone, the program aided completion of more than 1800 projects and leveraged every federal dollar spent on projects with almost 4 dollars in partner contributions.

In Pennsylvania, the Partners Program assisted in restoration of Cooper's Run, a trout fishery upstream of the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay. Like many successful conservation efforts, it was private landowners who initiated this project, with designs and permitting provided by Partners for Fish and Wildlife staff.

The work of the Partners Program enabled NGOs and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission to restore 14 stream and river miles, increasing habitat for trout, songbird, waterfowl, and threatened turtles.

Land and business owners will see tangible economic benefits as well thanks to reduced flooding and improved water quality. Ultimately, this project reduced sediment by approximately 214 tons per year.

Other highlights of the Partners Program in Pennsylvania include stream restoration projects enhancing our world class Spring Creek fishery, increasing the amount and quality of habitat, and providing greater access for angling and recreation. The program also supports implementation of our State Wildlife Action Plan, such as in Lancaster County, where we reintroduced the Chesapeake logperch, a Species of Greatest Conservation Need that we are actively working to keep from becoming endangered.

The Partners Program works with our Game Commission as well, creating hundreds of acres of habitat for American Woodcock and assisting with critical telemetry data on migration routes and breeding habitat. They are also working together to keep the Allegheny woodrat off the endangered species list by installing nesting structures and conducting ongoing scientific studies on colonization and the use of artificial structures.

This type of scientific support provided by the program helps state agencies maximize the impact of our conservation efforts and ensure the American taxpayer the best possible return for their investment in our public trust resources.

Other examples from across the country include partners' work at Riverbend West in Michigan last year, where \$73,000 in project investment from the program was leveraged with \$1 million in partner contributions to restore one of the few undeveloped riparian sites on the Saginaw River.

Mitigation of contaminated soils, eradication of invasive species, extensive planting of native species, and restoration of natural features significantly enhanced upland and wetland habitats for small mammals, herpetofauna, deer, waterfowl, and other migratory birds, but the benefits extend to people too. Projects like Riverbend West that provide targeted restoration within city limits ensure that the benefits of nature are more equitable and accessible for all members of the public to enjoy.

### **H.R. 4389, “Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act”**

Now, just a few comments on HR 4389. With its enactment in 2002, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act established one of the most cost-effective and impactful conservation programs for addressing the needs of migratory birds.

Although only a portion of the funding provided through the Act is applied to projects within the United States, the Association supports this bill because of the tangible positive impacts to bird species breeding within our states, many of which are Species of Greatest Conservation Need, and which spend the remainder of the year distributed throughout Latin America and Caribbean.

Absent a dedicated effort to support conservation projects in these areas, Neotropical migratory birds will continue to decline as they have been for the past fifty years despite the careful management by our state wildlife agencies. This bill will enable more on-the-ground conservation actions where it will benefit bird populations the most and continue to demonstrate the collaborative, multi-national approach necessary to be effective in the management of these species.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies strongly supports passage of HR 5009, which delivers commonsense, community-centered conservation that helps restore habitats and endangered wildlife, lifts up economies, and makes communities more secure. We also support HR 4389. Once again, thank you to Chairman Bentz, Ranking Member Huffman, and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify. I am glad to answer any questions you have or follow up with more information as needed.