

# **Committee on Resources**

## **Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans**

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### **Statement**

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#### **TESTIMONY OF THOMAS O. MELIUS, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS**

#### **ON**

#### **H.R. 2496, To Reauthorize the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act of 1994; and**

#### **H.R. 2821, To amend the North American Wetlands Conservation Act to provide for appointment of two additional members of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council.**

**September 23, 1999**

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Mr. Chairman, I am Tom Melius, Assistant Director for External Affairs for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I appreciate the opportunity to appear today to discuss these two Fish and Wildlife Service bills the Subcommittee is considering.

#### **H.R. 2496, Reauthorization of the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program**

The Fish and Wildlife Service strongly supports H.R. 2496, which was introduced by Congressman Solomon P. Ortiz. We would like to thank Mr. Ortiz for introducing this bill and for his continued support of this program.

H.R. 2496 would reauthorize administrative expenses for the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program at \$250,000 for fiscal year 2001 through fiscal year 2005. Funds appropriated under this program are used for various purposes, including salary and travel expenses for the Junior Duck Stamp Manager, travel expenses for the Junior Duck Stamp winners and their teachers and parents, mailing contest information and scholarships and ribbons for contest participants.

In 1989, the Federal Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program was developed initially by the Service with a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The program was sanctioned and expanded by Congress in 1994, with the enactment of Public Law 103-340.

This innovative program is designed to offer young people from kindergarten to high school the opportunity to learn about wildlife conservation through an integrated art and science curriculum. The primary focus of

the wildlife conservation program, which complements the regular environmental education curriculum for students, is waterfowl and wetland education. The highlight of the program is the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design art contest held annually and modeled after the successful Federal Duck Stamp. The Junior Duck Stamp program experienced a humble start with two states participating--California and Florida. Today, all fifty States and the District of Columbia participate.

Each year, as part of their environmental education studies, students throughout the Nation submit their designs relating to conservation of migratory birds (waterfowl entries) to a designated site in their State to be judged by volunteers who are versed in art and wildlife. The "Best of Show" designs in the State are forwarded to Washington, D.C., where they are judged by a panel of five judges. The first place design in the national contest becomes the Federal Junior Duck Stamp. The Junior Duck Stamp, which sells for \$5.00, is a collectible and is not used for hunting.

Because of the limited resources, States rely heavily on volunteers. These volunteers receive the art, record it, prepare the art for display and decide where in the State the contest will be held. Following the contest, they prepare the art for its return and prepare certificates of appreciation and ribbons for contest participants. Without these volunteers, the Junior Duck Stamp program could not be the success that it is.

The Service believes the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program plays an important role in the education of our youth and it instills in them an environmental conservation ethic. In 1998, over 42,000 students entered the art contest. Educators who have consulted with the Service on the development of the Program, estimate that for every student who enters the art contest ten other students actually participate in the curriculum. In addition, the winning designs are displayed at State Fairs, National Wildlife Refuges, art galleries, museums, and government buildings, encouraging and educating students and the public.

The Service strongly supports H.R. 2496, and we encourage Congress to pass this important legislation to help the Service continue providing this educational program for young people.

**H.R. 2821, North American Wetlands Council Expansion Act of 1999**The Service would like to thank Congressman Dingell and the Subcommittee for your continued interest in and support of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) and the work of the North American Wetlands Council. H.R. 2821 would amend NAWCA to expand the Council by adding two additional non-governmental organizations to the nine-member group. While the Service does not oppose the bill, we believe it is unnecessary because the Council has been working successfully for ten years to advance the goals of wetlands and migratory bird conservation.

### **History of NAWCA**

NAWCA provides matching grants to private or public organizations and individuals who have developed partnerships to carry out wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The law was originally passed to support activities under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international agreement that provides a strategy for the long-term protection of wetlands and associated upland habitats needed by waterfowl and other migratory birds in North America. NAWCA established a nine-member Council to review grant proposals and recommend approval of qualifying projects to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC).

In 1998, Congress reauthorized appropriations for NAWCA through fiscal year 2003, reflecting the strong support shared by Congress and the public for the Act's goals. The ceiling for appropriations for NAWCA is

\$30 million per year, and Congress has appropriated \$15 million for projects in fiscal year 1999, the highest level appropriated to date.

### **Successes of NAWCA**

From 1991 through March 1999, over 900 partners, including environmental groups, sportsmen's groups, corporations, farmers and ranchers, small businesses, and private citizens have been involved in 684 projects under NAWCA. The law requires that U.S. and Canadian partners focus on protecting, restoring, and/or enhancing important habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds. In Mexico, partners may develop training and management programs and conduct studies on sustainable use, in addition to habitat protection. NAWCA has supported projects with a total of over \$287 million in federal funding, and total partner contributions have exceeded \$727 million. The law requires non-federal matching dollars of 1:1; however, partners have averaged 2.5 dollars for every federal dollar. This tremendous leveraging has enabled well over 8 million acres of wetlands and associated uplands to be acquired, restored, or enhanced in the United States and Canada, while over 26 million acres in Mexico's large biosphere reserves have been affected through conservation education and management planning projects.

### **Current Operations of the Council**

NAWCA directs the Secretary of the Interior to appoint State and non-governmental agencies to the nine-member Council, with permanent seats for the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service and a representative from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The States are represented by State Directors of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and represent the four migratory bird flyways. The three non-governmental organizations are required to be active participants in wetlands conservation projects. Both the States and non-governmental members are appointed by the Secretary to serve three-year terms. The Secretary is authorized to appoint one alternate member to the Council, who is able to vote if one of the nine seats is vacant or a voting member is absent from a meeting. The Secretary is also encouraged to appoint ex officio members to the Council, who are not voting members but able to participate actively in the selection process. Currently one non-governmental organization holds this status. Mexico and Canada also have ex officio membership and participate in the decisions of the Council. The Council meets three times a year to review and rank project proposals and is served by staff which provides extensive technical advice. The Council recommends projects to the MBCC, which has the authority to approve funding for projects.

Over the past ten years, the current nine-member Council has successfully collaborated to select the most important projects to protect migratory birds and their habitats and further the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Part of the success of NAWCA has been the fair, equitable and non-biased way in which the Council has formulated sound recommendations to the MBCC. The results speak for themselves. NAWCA is one of the most successful and non-controversial federal conservation laws; mainly due to the partnerships that have been formed for on-the-ground restoration efforts. The Council embodies these successful partnerships and represents the broad-based coalition of interests committed to the protection of wetlands and migratory birds. For these reasons, the Service does not believe the Council needs to be expanded to meet its current mission. However, should Congress expand the mission of the Council as has been discussed in conjunction with debate on the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, then the addition of new members may bring important new expertise and perspectives to the Council.

### **Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation**

The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, which the Senate passed in April 1999 and is awaiting

floor action in the House, establishes a grants program to provide assistance in the conservation of neotropical migratory birds. The legislation encourages the Secretary of the Interior to establish an advisory group to provide guidance in implementing the grants program. If that legislation is enacted, the Service intends to designate the North American Wetlands Council as the advisory group for this program. This proposal would bring the expertise and experience of the Council to the full range of needs for neotropical birds that depend on healthy habitat throughout their migratory life cycles. Conservation of all migratory birds, not only in wetlands but in other important habitat areas as well, is already built into NAWCA. The Council is fully capable of carrying out this advisory role and has indicated its enthusiasm for doing so.

Recognizing this opportunity, the Service believes that if the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act were enacted, expanding the Council to include two additional non-governmental groups with expertise in Latin America, the Caribbean and neotropical migratory bird conservation would make sense to enhance the Council's current expertise. The Service looks forward to working with Congressman Dingell and the Subcommittee to explore these opportunities and fulfill the needs of all migratory birds including neotropical migrants, waterfowl and others.

This concludes my written testimony, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

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