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TESTIMONY OF STEVEN A. WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, REGARDING THE ADMINISTRATION'S FISCAL YEAR 2004 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

March 19, 2003

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee, I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you today and report on the Administration's fiscal year 2004 budget request for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Our budget request for 2004 is almost \$2.0 billion, consisting of \$1.3 billion in current appropriations under the purview of this Subcommittee as well as \$674.0 million in permanent appropriations.

The request continues key Administration priorities such as the Secretary's continued emphasis on conservation partnerships through a revised Cooperative Conservation Initiative that focuses on existing successful programs.

The Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife, North American Wetlands Joint Venture, Coastal and Refuge Challenge Cost-share programs are all included in this year's Cooperative Conservation Initiative. The budget provides \$15.0 million in increased funding for these programs, including \$9.0 million for Partners, \$3.0 million for Joint Ventures and \$3.0 million for Refuge Challenge Cost-share.

Our main operating account – Resource Management – is funded at \$941.5 million, a net increase of \$38.0 million over the 2003 request. We note this account is funded at \$30.0 million over the recently signed 2003 Omnibus spending bill.

The request includes \$7.0 million for fixed pay and other cost increases. The budget also includes a \$3.4 million general decrease for travel and transportation costs as well as an \$8.1 million reduction tied to information technology streamlining savings. Last, funding for several lower priority projects has been redirected to higher priorities.

President's Management Agenda

We support the President's Management Agenda and continue to create a citizen-centered organization by evaluating and implementing strategies to integrate budget and performance management, conduct workforce planning, competitively out-source with the private sector, expand e-government, and provide greater accountability to the American people.

The Service has worked closely with the Department over the past year to develop a more business-like approach to strategic planning and the 2004 budget. Substantial new performance information is contained in our justifications along with the series of traditional information that has supported previous Congressional decision-making on the budget request.

Last, the National Fish Hatchery System and Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program were evaluated under the Administration's Program Assessment Rating Tool during the 2004 budget process. I will discuss more on the PART process later.

Fisheries Vision for the Future

We request \$103.6 million, a net increase of \$8.8 million over the 2003 request to implement the Fisheries Program's 'Vision for the Future' through increased funding for hatchery operations and hatchery maintenance and increased emphasis on aquatic invasive species. For comparative purposes, this level is \$3.0 million below the recently signed 2003 Omnibus spending bill, largely attributed to unrequested projects included in the Omnibus bill.

Our 'Vision for the Future,' with the backing of this Presidential budget request, will help to do more for aquatic resources and the people who value and depend on them through enhanced partnerships, scientific integrity, and a balanced approach to conservation. This 'Vision' will help the Service better support the sport fishing community, which has historically been one of this agency's most valuable and valued partners. It also will help efforts to restore imperiled species.

We seek a total of \$58.0 million for the National Fish Hatchery System, a net increase of \$8.0 million above the 2003 request level. The National Fish Hatchery System was one of over 200 programs evaluated using the Administration's Program Assessment Rating Tool during the FY 2004 budget process. New goals were developed consistent with the President's Management Agenda, the Department's Draft Strategic Plan, and the Fisheries Vision. This year's increase is a direct reflection of the program's shift towards becoming more performance oriented.

\$5.0 million will support operations:

- \$1.6 million will support an additional 29 priority recovery tasks prescribed in approved Recovery Plans in 2004, an increase of 11%.
- \$2.5 million will implement 32 additional restoration/recreation projects to conserve and restore aquatic resources, roughly 72% of all restoration activities.
- \$900,000 will be used to conduct 16 high priority projects addressing science and technology objectives supporting valuable recreational fisheries and recovery of imperiled species.

\$3.0 million will improve the hatchery system's aging infrastructure to good and fair operational conditions to meet fishery management and recovery plan requirements. Of this total, \$2.5 million will be directed toward 16 additional high priority deferred maintenance projects. The remaining \$500,000 will enable the Service to complete Condition Assessments on 75 percent of its field stations in 2004, and to streamline maintenance reporting and accountability by implementing the Service Asset and Maintenance Management System (SAMMS).

An additional \$1.0 million will prevent the introduction of aquatic invasive species, detect and rapidly respond to aquatic invasive species, and control and manage aquatic invasive species such as Asian carp in the Mississippi drainage and Asian swamp Eel in the Everglades.

We also note that while this year's budget focuses on much needed increases for the hatchery system, we continue to strongly support aquatic habitat needs through a variety of programs. For example, the budget continues base funding for fish passage projects, for aquatic habitat restoration, and for other projects, some of which will be discussed below.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife

To date the Partners program has worked with 28,700 private landowners through voluntary partnerships to implement on-the-ground habitat restoration projects covering 360,000 acres across the country.

The Partners Program was also one of over 200 programs evaluated using the Administration's Program Assessment Rating Tool during the FY 2004 budget process. This year's increase is a direct reflection of the program's achievement of annual performance goals.

We are requesting an additional \$9.1 million in the 2004 request to increase the program's capabilities to enter into meaningful partnerships resulting in on-the-ground habitat restoration accomplishments.

For example, the Service will work with the California University of Pennsylvania on a landscape-scale habitat restoration program in the Buffalo Creek Watershed, Washington County, Pennsylvania and Brooke County, West Virginia to install streambank fencing, cattle crossings, and constructing alternate watering sources for livestock. And, in Alaska, the Service will work with the Chickaloon Village to restore fish passage within the Moose Creek watershed to restore all five species of Pacific salmon to the watershed.

During 2004, the Partners program will:

- enhance or restore a total of 66,365 acres of wetlands through voluntary agreements to help improve fish and wildlife habitats;

- enhance or restore a total of 287,507 acres of upland habitat through voluntary agreements to help improve fish and wildlife populations;
- enhance or restore a total of 830 miles of riparian and stream habitat through voluntary agreements to help improve fish and wildlife populations.

National Wildlife Refuge System

Significant funding increases will support high priority needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Last year, the President's Budget requested the largest increase in the system's history to celebrate the Refuge System's Centennial in March 2003. This year the Administration request builds on that substantial increase with another \$25.5 million. For comparative purposes, this is a \$33.6 million increase over the recently signed 2003 Omnibus spending bill.

Together with last year's request, this totals over \$82.0 million for much needed operations and maintenance projects within the refuge program.

A \$5.0 million increase will provide start up costs for new and expanded refuges including Vieques, Midway Atoll, and Don Edwards. Invasive species encroaching upon the refuge system will be addressed with an additional \$2.1 million to combat nutria, Tamarisk and Giant Salvinia, among others.

We will fund additional Challenge Cost Share projects under the Cooperative Conservation Initiative with \$3.0 million; support additional Comprehensive Conservation Plans with \$2.0 million; and control Chronic Wasting Disease on the refuge system with \$500,000.

Other priorities include \$1.6 million for refuge law enforcement, \$2.0 million for Land Management Research Demonstration Units, \$1.0 million for environmental education, and \$7.0 million for refuge specific priorities.

On the maintenance front, additional maintenance funding will upgrade the SAMMS module with \$2.0 million.

Endangered Species

The endangered species program is funded at \$129.0 million, \$3.0 million above the 2003 request level. The program funding will support operations that enhance implementation of the Endangered Species Act, one of the nation's most significant environmental laws.

An increase of \$3.2 million is required to address the growing listing program litigation-driven workload. This additional funding is necessary to address listing actions required by court orders or settlement agreements.

Additional high priority recovery actions, including immediate actions needed to stabilize critically imperiled species and actions that could lead to delisting nearly recovered species will be implemented nationwide with an additional \$2.0 million. Potential actions include, for example, propagation and habitat restoration for aquatic species in the Southern Appalachians and Lower Tennessee Cumberland ecosystems, a region containing the highest diversity of freshwater fishes and snails in the United States and the highest diversity of freshwater mussels and crayfishes in the world.

Other Operations Increases

A \$3.0 million increase for the Joint Venture program will provide a total of \$10.4 million for the program, in line with target levels. As of December 2002, Plan partners have contributed approximately \$1.5 billion to protect, restore, or enhance almost 5 million acres of U.S. wetlands, grasslands, forests, and riparian habitat, more than one-third of the 16 million acres of U.S. habitat objectives under the Plan.

Our law enforcement program will hire nine additional wildlife inspectors with an additional \$1.0 million to interdict and deter the illegal trade in protecting species thus sustaining biological communities. In addition, manatee protection efforts will be accelerated in Florida by protecting manatees from boat strikes and enforcing speed zones in refuges and sanctuary areas with a \$500,000 increase.

Easements and Land Acquisition

The President's budget request reduces our traditional land acquisition program by \$29.6 million to a \$40.7

million level to fund high-priority conservation easements or acquisition of land from willing sellers. For comparative purposes, the account is funded at \$32.2 million below the recently signed 2003 Omnibus spending bill. Highlights include \$5.0 million for conservation easements on the Quinault Indian Reservation in Washington State and \$5.0 million for the Baca Ranch in Colorado.

Construction

The Construction account totals \$35.4 million, roughly equal with last year's request. This request level will fund 19 dam safety, road and bridge safety, and other priority projects at national wildlife refuges, fish hatcheries, and law enforcement facilities. Highlights include replacement of the Great Lakes fish stocking vessel M/V Togue, replacement of the office building at Cabo Rojo NWR in Puerto Rico, and \$1.0 million to begin an aircraft replacement program to support important migratory bird surveys important to setting hunting regulations.

Grant Programs

We will continue conservation efforts through cooperation, consultation and communication with all stakeholders including States, the District of Columbia, Territories and Tribes. The President's 2004 budget continues to support active participation on the part of the States and other partners in resource conservation efforts. To this end, the budget provides \$247.0 million for five Service grant programs that facilitate State and local conservation efforts.

Recognizing the opportunities for conservation of endangered and threatened species through partnerships with private landowners, the budget includes \$50.0 million to continue the Landowner Incentive and Private Stewardship programs.

We are requesting \$86.6 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund, \$2.3 million below the 2003 request level, and \$6.1 million above the 2003 Omnibus spending bill. The proposed funding level would provide \$50.0 million to support Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition; \$17.8 million for Recovery Land Acquisition grants to help implement approved species recovery plans; \$7.5 million for traditional grants to states; and \$8.9 million for HCP planning assistance to states.

The budget includes \$60.0 million (including a \$5 million tribal set-aside) for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, roughly level with the FY 2003 request level, and \$4.6 million below the 2003 Omnibus spending bill.

A \$50.0 million request for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund includes an increase of \$6.0 million above the 2003 request level, and \$11.3 million above the 2003 Omnibus spending bill. This Fund protects and restores wetland ecosystems that serve as habitat and resting areas for migratory game and non-game birds, and supports non-regulatory private-public investments in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

International Conservation

\$7.0 million is available for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund, \$2.0 million above the 2003 requested level.

Conclusion

Thank you very much. We appreciate the Committee's past support, and look forward to working with the Committee in the future.