



# THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

*Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation*

23 March 2015

Submitted to: Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Re: FY 2016 Budgets for FWS, BLM, USGS, and USFS

The Wildlife Society appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on the FY 2016 budget for the Department of Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit scientific and educational association representing nearly 9,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers. Our mission is to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation.

## **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

The **State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program** is the only federal program that supports states in preventing wildlife from becoming endangered. It is also the primary program supporting implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans, which detail on the ground conservation actions in each state to keep common species common. Funding assistance for state wildlife agencies is one of the highest priority needs to prevent further declines in at-risk species in every state. Previous budget reductions and sequestration have had a serious and disproportionate impact on State and Tribal Wildlife Grants. We are appreciative of the increase in funding recommended in the President's budget, to \$70 million in FY 2016. **We recommend Congress appropriate at least \$70 million for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants in FY 2016. We also ask that Congress not shift additional funds directed to States through formula grants to a competitive allocation.** This funding is critical for maintaining wildlife diversity programs at the state level and a further reduction in the formula grants may have dramatic negative consequences.

As a member of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement, or CARE, **The Wildlife Society supports the President's request for the National Wildlife Refuge System's operations and maintenance accounts at \$508.2 million for FY16.** CARE estimates that the Refuge System needs at least \$900 million in annual operations and maintenance funding to properly administer its 562 refuges and 38 wetland management districts spanning over 150 million acres. Given current fiscal realities, we understand that funding at \$900 million is not currently possible. However, at its highest funding level in FY 2010, the Refuge System received only \$503 million—little more than half the needed amount. Since that time, congressional appropriations have not only failed to account for rising costs, but have been steadily backsliding resulting in the loss of 324 employees since 2011, or 9% of all staff. Yet the Refuge System actually pays for itself several times over by generating \$4.87 in economic activity for every \$1 appropriated by Congress to run the Refuge System.

The **North American Wetlands Conservation Act** is a cooperative, non-regulatory, incentive-based program that has shown unprecedented success in restoring wetlands, waterfowl, and other migratory bird populations. This program has remained drastically underfunded despite its

demonstrated effectiveness. **We support the President's request of \$34.1 million and encourage Congress to match this request for FY 2016.**

The **Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants Program** supports partnership programs to conserve birds in the U.S., Latin America and the Caribbean, where approximately 5 billion birds representing 341 species spend their winters, including some of the most endangered birds in North America. This program should be funded at or above \$6.5 million to achieve maximum success. However, recognizing the current fiscal climate, The Wildlife Society recommends Congress **increase funding for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act to \$4.16 million in FY 2016.**

For FY2016, the FWS proposes to restructure the budget for all endangered species work within the **Ecological Services Program**. Endangered species recovery efforts can ultimately lead to delisting, resulting in significant benefits to species through state management efforts. FWS, with the help of federal and state agency partners, has been working to implement new strategies to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of this program and to reduce the regulatory burden on private landowners and industry partners. To support these actions and the increased emphasis on consultation and recovery, we recommend Congress **match the President's request and provide \$38 million for Listing, \$108.9 million for Planning and Consultation, and \$126.3 million for Conservation and Restoration in FY 2016.**

The voluntary **Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFW)** provides financial and technical assistance to private landowners across the country to restore degraded habitat and to safeguard against potential regulatory burdens associated with endangered species listings. With over two-thirds of our nation's lands held as private property, and up to 90 percent of some habitats lost, private lands play a key role in preserving our ecosystem. For example, working under a new MOU with the Natural Resource Conservation Service, PFW has been critical in engaging private landowners to restore and maintain habitat for the Greater-sage Grouse in states like Idaho and Nevada; potentially removing the need for a future listing. We urge Congress to **provide \$60 million in support of the PFW Program in FY 2016** in order to allow landowners to help contribute to land and wildlife preservation.

Through its **International Affairs office**, FWS works with many partners and countries in the implementation of international treaties, conventions, and projects for the conservation of wildlife species and their habitats. International trade, import, and transportation of wildlife species can have a huge impact on America's security, economy, and environment. Careful regulation of imports and implementation of international policies is an important task. We ask Congress to **match the President's request of \$14.7 million in support of FWS International Affairs in FY 2016.**

### **Bureau of Land Management**

BLM lands support over 3,000 species of wildlife, more than 300 federally proposed or listed species, and more than 1,300 sensitive plant species. Historically, the **Wildlife and Fisheries Management (WFM) and the Threatened and Endangered Species Management (TESM)** programs have been forced to pay for the compliance activities of BLM's energy, grazing, and other non-wildlife related programs, eroding both their ability to conduct proactive conservation activities and their efforts to recover listed species. Given the significant underfunding of the

BLM's wildlife programs, combined with the tremendous expansion of energy development across the BLM landscape, we recommend Congress **appropriate \$89.4 million for BLM Wildlife Management in FY 2016**. This will allow BLM to maintain and restore wildlife and habitat by monitoring habitat conditions, conducting inventories of wildlife resources, and developing cooperative management plans. We support the proposed increase of \$37 million for sage-grouse conservation efforts; this kind of broad-scale, landscape based conservation is exactly what is needed to manage and conserve sage-grouse across their range.

Increased funding is also needed for the **Threatened and Endangered Species Management Program**, to allow BLM to meet its responsibilities in endangered species recovery plans. BLM's March 2001 Report to Congress called for a doubling of the Threatened and Endangered Species budget to \$48 million and an additional 70 staff positions over 5 years. This goal has yet to be met. In light of this, **we strongly encourage Congress to increase overall funding for BLM's endangered species program to \$48 million in FY 2016**.

The Wildlife Society, part of the National Horse and Burro Rangeland Management Coalition, appreciates the commitment of BLM to addressing the problems associated with **Wild Horse and Burro Management**. We support the requested increase of \$3 million for implementation of the National Academy of Sciences recommendations and findings and continued research and development on contraception and population control. However, with more than 22,500 horses above BLM's stated Appropriate Management Levels on the range and nearly 50,000 horses in off-site long- and short-term holding facilities The Wildlife Society is concerned about BLM's emphasis on fertility control alone. The current language limiting the use of humane euthanasia for unwanted or unadoptable horses should be removed to allow BLM to use all necessary management tools to bring populations of on- and off-range wild horses and burros within manageable range and additional funding should be requested to correct the habitat damage that has occurred due to overpopulation of these animals. **The requested \$80.6 million should be provided to BLM if they continue removing excess horses from the range at a reasonable rate and focus additional resources on habitat restoration.**

### **U.S. Geological Survey**

The basic, objective, and interdisciplinary scientific research that is supported by the USGS is necessary for understanding the complex environmental issues facing our nation today. This science will play an essential role in the decision-making processes of natural resource managers, and it will help protect our water supply and conserve endangered species. More investment is needed to strengthen USGS partnerships, improve monitoring, produce high-quality geospatial data, and deliver the best science to address critical environmental and societal challenges. **The Wildlife Society supports funding of at least \$1.2 billion for USGS in FY 2016.**

The **Ecosystems Program** of USGS contains programmatic resources for fisheries, wildlife, environments, invasive species and the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. The Ecosystems program strives to maximize research and support for comprehensive biological and ecosystem based needs. **The Wildlife Society supports the President's request of \$176 million for USGS's Ecosystems Department in FY 2016.** Within Ecosystems, **we support the request of \$46.7 million for the Wildlife Program.**

The **Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units** (CFWRUs) are managed under the Ecosystems Department and conduct research on renewable natural resource questions, participate in the education of graduate students, provide technical assistance and consultation on natural resource issues, and provide continuing education for natural resource professionals. In FY 2001, Congress fully funded the CFWRUs, allowing unit productivity to rise to record levels. Since then, budgetary shortfalls have continued to cause an erosion of available funds, resulting in a current staffing vacancy of nearly one quarter of the professional workforce. In order to fill current vacancies, restore seriously eroded operational funds for each CFWRU, and enhance national program coordination, **the FY 2016 budget for the CFWRUs should be increased to \$20 million, the level requested by the President.** This would restore necessary capacity in the CFWRU program and allow it to meet the nation's research and training needs.

The **National Climate Change and Wildlife Science Center** plays a pivotal role in addressing the impacts of climate change on fish and wildlife by providing essential scientific support. In order for this role to be fully realized, **we recommend that Congress fund the National Climate Change and Wildlife Science Center at the requested \$37.4 million in FY 2016.**

### **U.S. Forest Service**

Our national forests and grasslands are essential to the conservation of our nation's wildlife and habitat, and are home to about 425 threatened and endangered species, and another 3,250 at-risk species. In FY 2011, the Forest Service combined several programs and budgets, including Vegetation and Watershed Management, Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management, and Forest Products into a single Integrated Resource Restoration activity budget. Although we have some reservations about this merger, because it makes accountability to stakeholders and Congress more difficult, we urge Congress **to support the request of \$822.1 million for the Integrated Resource Restoration program in FY 2016.**

Integral to management of our natural resources is a deep understanding of the biological and geological forces that shape the land and its wildlife and plant communities. The research being done by the USFS is at the forefront of science, and essential to improving the health of our nation's forests and grasslands. Furthermore, it will play a key role in developing strategies for mitigating the effects of climate change. We urge Congress to match the President's request of **\$292 million in FY 2016 for Forest and Rangelands** to support this high-quality research.

### **Wildfire Disaster Funding Act**

We appreciate the Committee's support of the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (H.R. 167) and request it be included in this bill. It would provide the structure to fund a portion of the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and Department of the Interior (DOI) wildfire suppression costs through a budget cap adjustment under the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, as amended, and provide the USFS and DOI with a funding structure similar to that used by other agencies who respond to natural disaster emergencies.

Thank you for considering the recommendations of wildlife professionals. Please contact Laura Bies, Director of Government Affairs at (301) 897-9770 x 308 with any questions.