



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

Date: 25 March 2016

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

Submitted by: Byron Ken Williams, PhD, CWB®
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Re: FY 2017 Appropriations for FWS, BLM, USGS, and USFS

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The Wildlife Society appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony concerning the FY 2017 budgets for the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)**, **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**, **U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)**, and **U.S. Forest Service (USFS)**. The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is an international non-profit scientific and educational association representing nearly 10,000 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. We respectfully request the following programmatic funding in FY 2017 to ensure that the federal budget supports the important work wildlife professionals do to manage and conserve our nation's wildlife resources.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The **State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program (SWG)** has been the nation's *core* program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered since 2001. SWG provides federal funding assistance to state and tribal wildlife agencies for implementing on-the-ground conservation programs designed to ensure the sustainability of our fish and wildlife resources. In order to receive federal funds through SWG, each state and territory must develop a **Wildlife Action Plan** that examines the health of wildlife, identifies issues of conservation concern, and prescribes actions needed to conserve more than 12,000 at-risk species and their vital habitats. These action plans encourage multi-partner projects, have high accountability, and require matching-funds from states. As the only federal program focused on keeping common species common, SWG alleviates the need to add more species to the federal Endangered Species List; thereby saving taxpayer dollars and reducing regulatory uncertainty for businesses. Recent successes of SWG include the New England cottontail rabbit and greater sage-grouse. **The Wildlife Society strongly recommends that Congress increase funding for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants to at least \$67 million in FY 2017, as per the Agency's request.**

Previous budget reductions in SWG, though, have not allowed this highly successful program to reach its full potential. A March 2016 report from the *Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources* highlights the nation's need for immediate and

robust long-term investment in science-based management, and recommends that Congress dedicate \$1.3 billion annually to ensure the effective implementation of all Wildlife Action Plans. As a leading member of *Teaming With Wildlife*, a multidisciplinary, bipartisan coalition of more than 6,400 organizations supporting reliable fish and wildlife conservation funding, The Wildlife Society encourages Congress to consider the legislative solutions presented by this diverse and distinguished panel.

As a member of the *Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE)*, **The Wildlife Society supports the President's request for the National Wildlife Refuge System's operations and maintenance accounts at \$506.6 million for FY 2017.** 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. At its highest funding level in FY 2010, the Refuge System received only \$503 million—little more than half the needed amount. Without adequate funding, habitats are not restored, invasive species are left unchecked, poaching and other illegal activities occur, and our nation's wildlife suffers. Moreover, since 2009, the National Wildlife Refuge System has lost over 500 employees (1/7 of all staff), despite generating approximately \$4.87 in economic activity for every \$1 appropriated by Congress. **The Wildlife Society also supports the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Resource Protection Act**, which would remove taxpayer responsibility for damage deliberately caused by a third party within the National Wildlife Refuge System by justly attributing those damages to the guilty party.

The **North American Wetlands Conservation Act** is a cooperative, non-regulatory, incentive-based program that has shown unprecedented success in maintaining and restoring wetlands, waterfowl, and other migratory bird populations. This program has remained drastically underfunded despite its demonstrated effectiveness. **We support the Agency's request of \$35.1 million and encourage Congress to match this request for FY 2017.**

The **Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) 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. Reauthorization for appropriations has expired under NMBCA, but the Agency recommends funding the program at \$3.9 million for FY 2017 as a sub-account of the Multinational Species Conservation Fund. **The Wildlife Society supports this funding, and recommends that Congress reauthorize NMBCA at \$6.5 million annually to achieve maximum conservation results under the program.**

Through the **Ecological Services Program**, FWS partners with federal/state agencies, tribes, local governments, the business community, and private citizens, to help identify species on the verge of extinction and reduce threats to their survival so that they can be removed from federal protection. FWS is working to implement new strategies to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Ecological Services 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 Agency's request and provide \$23 million for Listing, \$105.7 million for Planning and Consultation, \$34.6 million for Conservation and Restoration, and \$89.2 million for Recovery in FY 2017.**

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. Careful regulation of imports and implementation of international policies is an important task, and represents our first line of defense against the introduction of threats like the potentially devastating infectious wildlife disease *Bsal*, which threatens the integrity of our diverse and important native salamander populations. We ask Congress to **match the Agency's request of \$15.8 million in support of FWS International Affairs in FY 2017.**

Bureau of Land Management

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. In order to allow BLM to effectively maintain and restore wildlife and habitat amidst the tremendous expansion of energy development across the BLM landscape, **we recommend Congress appropriate \$108.7 million for BLM Wildlife Management within WFM in FY 2017. We also support the proposed increase of \$14.2 million for greater sage-grouse conservation;** this kind of broad-scale conservation is necessary to manage/conservate greater sage-grouse across their entire range.

To allow BLM to meet its responsibilities in endangered species recovery plans, the **Threatened and Endangered Species Management Program (TESM)**, also needs increased funding. 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. Now, over a decade later, this goal has yet to be met. In light of this, **we strongly encourage Congress to increase overall funding for TESSM to \$48 million in FY 2017.**

The Wildlife Society, leader 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**. The Wildlife Society also thanks Congress for the much needed increase in funding for FY 2016 for continued research and development on contraception and population control. The Wildlife Society, however, remains concerned about BLM's emphasis on fertility control alone. Horses and burros currently exceed the BLM's estimated threshold of ecological sustainability by more than 31,000—over twice BLM's Appropriate Management Level. With nearly 50,000 additional horses living in federal off-site long- and short-term holding facilities, ***The Wildlife Society believes the current language limiting the use of humane euthanasia for unwanted or unadoptable horses should be removed.*** BLM needs to use *all* necessary management tools to bring populations of on- and off-range wild horses and burros within manageable levels. **Therefore, The Wildlife Society supports the Agency's request of \$80.1 million for Wild Horse and Burro Management, provided that BLM remove excess horses from the range at a reasonable rate and focus additional resources on habitat restoration to correct the habitat damage caused by these animals.**

U.S. Geological Survey

The basic, objective, and interdisciplinary scientific research that is supported by USGS is necessary for understanding the complex environmental issues facing our nation today. The **Ecosystems Department** of USGS contains programmatic resources for fisheries, wildlife, environments, invasive species, and **Cooperative Research Units (CRU)**. The Ecosystems program strives to maximize research and support for comprehensive biological and ecosystem based needs. **The Wildlife Society supports the Agency's request of \$174 million for USGS's Ecosystems Department in FY 2017.** Furthermore, within the Ecosystems Department, **we support the specific request of at least \$18.2 million for the underfunded CRU program**, which leverages federal, state, non-governmental organizations, and academic partnerships to provide actionable science that supports management of wildlife and fisheries resources.

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 \$31 million in FY 2017.**

U.S. Forest Service

Current mechanisms for calculating USFS appropriations have resulted in funding shortfalls for proactive wildland fire and fuel management practices, thereby leading to more destructive and costly wildfires. The traditional ten-year moving average for forecasting fire suppression costs for the upcoming fiscal year, has not met USFS suppression needs since FY 2002. In FY 2015, USFS was forced to transfer \$700 million from non-suppression accounts to make up for the emergency fire suppression deficit. This has negatively impacted the ability of USFS to implement proactive forest research and management projects and has resulted in the loss of 40% of non-fire related USFS professionals. We are thankful to Congress for the full transfer repayment and increased suppression funding in FY 2016. However, we understand this is not expected to occur every year. DOI and USFS need a long-term fire funding solution that would result in stable and predictable budgets. Therefore, we support bipartisan Congressional efforts, like the *Wildfire Disaster Funding Act*, to address federal fire funding challenges, minimize fund transfers, and address the continued erosion of agency budgets over time, with the goal of reinvesting in key programs that would restore forests to healthier conditions.

For the FY 2017 budget, USFS will transition from Integrated Resource Restoration back to a more traditional budget structure with separate line items, including Vegetation and Watershed Management, **Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management**, and Forest Products. We support this change for the accountability it provides Congress, and **support the request of \$140.5 million for Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management in FY 2017.**

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. **We urge Congress to at minimum match the Agency's request of \$292 million in FY 2017 for Forest and Rangelands** to support this high-quality research.