

**BUYING MORE LAND WHEN WE  
CAN'T MAINTAIN WHAT WE  
ALREADY OWN: THE NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM'S  
OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE  
BACKLOG STORY!**

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**OVERSIGHT HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE,  
OCEANS AND INSULAR AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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Thursday, May 26, 2011

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TENANCE BACKLOG STORY!”**

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**Thursday, May 26, 2011  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Washington, D.C.**

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The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:46 p.m. in Room 1334, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. John Fleming [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Fleming, Duncan, Southerland, Flores, Runyan, and Sablan.

Dr. FLEMING. The Subcommittee will come to order. The Chairman notes the presence of a quorum. First of all, I want to thank our witnesses and the audience today for your patience while we were on the Floor working on a very important bill. So, thank you.

Today, the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs will conduct an oversight hearing on the operations and maintenance backlog within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

This is the fifth hearing this Committee has conducted on this subject, but the first since March 23, 2001. Under Committee Rule 4[f], opening statements are limited to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee so that we can hear from our witnesses more quickly.

However, I ask for unanimous consent to include any other Members’ opening statements in the hearing record if submitted to the Clerk by close of business today. Hearing no objection, so ordered.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN FLEMING, A REPRESENTATIVE IN  
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF LOUISIANA**

Dr. FLEMING. While much has changed over the past 16 years, I found it fascinating to review previous testimony. For instance, at the hearing on July 25th, 1996, the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Chief of Refuges, Dr. Robert Streeter, testified that, “We feel that it is time to break that historic pattern of benign neglect in our

National Wildlife Refuge System. If we were a modern business, we would be well down the road to bankruptcy.”

Five years later, a new Refuge Chief, who has now been nominated as the sixteenth Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service testified that “As we look to the future, our greatest responsibility and priority is taking care of what we have, the maintenance of the facilities and equipment that we need to accomplish our mission.”

More recently, the 2010 report issued by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement stated that “Washed out trails, leaking roofs, closed roads, and broken equipment, plague the refuge system.”

How did we get to this point? In 1996, when Dr. Streeter was talking about bankruptcy, the operations and maintenance backlog was \$440 million. When Mr. Ashe was addressing the Subcommittee, the backlog had grown to \$1.9 billion.

Today, the cumulative backlog is \$3.3 billion, which includes more than 1200 invasive species projects, national fish hatchery projects, 3,342 mission-critical projects, 5,349 operations projects, 5,994 refuge road projects, and more than 12,000 refuge facilities in need of immediate repair.

As a direct result of this backlog, there are miles of impassable or unsafe roads, millions of refuge acres infected with invasive species, a severe shortage of law enforcement personnel and 326 refuges that are either unstaffed or closed to the public.

When the Congress approved the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, a fundamental goal of that historic law was to establish the finest refuge system in the world. It is difficult for anyone to argue that we are close to achieving that goal.

What we need is a new paradigm or vision for addressing this problem. This is the purpose of today’s hearing, to obtain the views of many of the same organizations who have testified in the past and to have what may be becoming an overused term, an adult conversation, on how to address this problem.

While there are no bad ideas, I would caution our witnesses and the listening public that we are not going to significantly reduce this backlog by depending exclusively on discretionary funds.

It is highly unlikely that Congress is going to appropriate a huge new infusion of taxpayer money. Instead, I would hope that our witnesses would look at certain suggestions, including whether a portion of money allocated to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, should be set aside for refuge operations and maintenance, and whether the Service should limit their acquisition dollars to conservation easements, and not fee title acquisition, if certain unstaffed refuges can be managed or transferred to States, Native American tribes, or other municipalities under Memoranda of Understanding, and whether the 44 million Americans who visit a refuge each year would be willing to contribute more to its upkeep through the Recreation Fee Program.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of our distinguished witnesses, and I now recognize our Ranking Member from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Congressman Sablan, for any statement that he would like to make.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Fleming follows:]

**Statement of The Honorable John Fleming, Chairman,  
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs**

Good afternoon, today the Subcommittee will conduct an oversight hearing on the operations and maintenance backlog within the National Wildlife Refuge System. This is the fifth hearing this Subcommittee has conducted on this subject but the first since March 23, 2001.

While much has changed over the past ten years, I found it fascinating to review previous testimony. For instance, at the hearing on July 25, 1996, the Fish and Wildlife Service's Chief of Refuges, Dr. Robert Streeter testified that: "We feel it is time to break that historic pattern of benign neglect in our National Wildlife Refuge System. If we were a modern business, we would be well down the road to bankruptcy".

Five years later, a new Refuge Chief, who has now been nominated as the 16th Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service testified that: "As we look to the future, our greatest responsibility and priority is taking care of what we have, the maintenance of the facilities and equipment that we need to accomplish our mission".

More recently, the 2010 Report issued by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement stated that: "Washed-out trails, leaking roofs, closed roads, and broken equipment plague the refuge system".

How do we get to this point? In 1996, when Dr. Streeter was talking about bankruptcy, the operations and maintenance backlog was \$440 million. When Mr. Ashe was addressing the Subcommittee the backlog had grown to \$1.9 billion. Today, the cumulative backlog is \$3.3 billion which includes more than 1,200 invasive species projects; 1,400 national fish hatchery projects; 3,342 "mission critical" projects; 5,994 refuge road projects and more than 12,000 refuge facilities which are in need of immediate repair.

As a direct result of this backlog, there are miles of impassable or unsafe roads, millions of refuge acres infested with invasive species, a severe shortage of law enforcement personnel and 326 refuges that are either unstaffed or closed to the public. When the Congress approved the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, a fundamental goal of that historic law was to establish the finest refuge system in the world. It is difficult for anyone to argue that we are close to achieving that goal.

What we need is a new paradigm or vision for addressing this problem. This is the purpose of today's hearing to obtain the views of many of the same organizations who have testified in the past and to have what may be becoming an over used term an "adult conversation" on how to address this problem.

While there are no bad ideas, I would caution our witnesses and the listening public that we are not going to significantly reduce this backlog by depending exclusively on discretionary funds. It is highly unlikely that Congress is going to appropriate a huge new infusion of taxpayer money.

Instead, I would hope our witnesses would look at certain suggestions including whether a portion of money allocated to the Land and Water Conservation Fund should be set-aside for refuge operations and maintenance, whether the Service should limit their acquisition dollars to conservation easements and not fee title acquisition, if certain unstaffed refuges can be managed or transfer to States, native American tribes or other municipalities under Memorandum of Understandings and whether the 44 million Americans who visit a refuge each year would be willing to contribute more to its upkeep through the Recreation Fee Program.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of our distinguished witnesses. I am now pleased to recognize our Ranking Democratic Member from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Congressman Sablan for any statement he would like to make.

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**STATEMENT OF HON. GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN, A  
DELEGATE IN CONGRESS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF  
THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS**

Mr. SABLAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon everyone. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's finest network of protected lands and waters designed to conserve our fish and wildlife resources.

Refuges are located in every State and in nearly every territory, including the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Millions of people visit refuge camps each year to hunt, fish, and observe wildlife, and the refuge system generates \$1.7 billion in sales for local communities, and creates nearly 27,000 jobs annually.

The refuge system is under increasing strain from operations and maintenance backlogs of \$3.4 billion. In my own district, the operating needs require to hire staff to manage and to develop, and to implement visitor services, education, and volunteer programs at the Mariana Trench, and the Mariana's Arc of Fire National Wildlife Refuge, are expected to cost over \$380,000.

While the specific refuges are relatively new, the overall operations and maintenance backlog did not arise overnight. This backlog has been a growing problem from decades of chronic underfunding over many Administrations and Congresses, both Republican and Democrat.

We must find ways to provide additional resources and support to the refuge system to address this problem, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, who have been invited to share their creative ideas and solutions on how to address the refuge system's operation and maintenance backlog.

It is imperative that we also make important legacy investments in our refuges now to ensure that the fish, wildlife, and habitats are protected for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is generated by oil and gas drilling revenues, are not taxpayer dollars, and provides the Fish and Wildlife Service with resources that it needs to acquire lands and conservation easements from willing sellers and landowners, which can result in operational efficiencies, and conductivity within the refuge system.

Whether for operations, maintenance, conservation easements, or land annexations, every \$1 invested in our refuge system by the Federal Government returns about \$4 to local communities.

Supporting the refuge system is a worthy investment to conserve fish and wildlife, and to protect a critical part of America's natural heritage, and to support all of the communities which are present. Again, I thank the witnesses for testifying today, and I look forward to learning more about this important issue. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sablan follows:]

**Statement of The Honorable Gregorio Kili Camacho Sablan, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's finest network of protected lands and waters designed to conserve our fish and wildlife resources. Refuges are located in every state and in nearly every territory, including in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Millions of people visit refuges each year to hunt, fish, and observe wildlife; and the Refuge System generates \$1.7 billion in sales for local communities and creates nearly 27,000 jobs annually.

The Refuge System is under increasing strain from tight budgets and an operations and maintenance backlogs of \$3.4 billion. In my own district, the operating needs required to hire staff to manage, and to develop and implement visitor services, education, and volunteer programs at the Mariana Trench and the Mariana Arc of Fire National Wildlife Refuges are expected to cost over \$380,000.

While these specific refuges are relatively new, the overall operations and maintenance backlog did not arise overnight. This backlog has been a growing problem from decades of chronic underfunding over many Administrations and Congresses,



both Republican and Democrat. We must find ways to provide additional resources and support to the Refuge System to address this problem and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, who have been invited to share their creative ideas and solutions on how to address the Refuge System's operations and maintenance backlog.

It is imperative that we also make important legacy investments in our refuges *now* to ensure that these fish, wildlife, and habitats are protected for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is generated by offshore oil and gas drilling revenues and not taxpayers' dollars, provides the Fish and Wildlife Service with resources it needs to acquire lands and conservation easements from *willing* sellers and land owners, which can result in operational efficiencies and connectivity within the Refuge System.

Whether for operations, maintenance, conservation easements, or land acquisition, every one dollar invested in our Refuge System by the federal government returns about four dollars to local communities. Supporting the Refuge System is a worthy investment to conserve fish and wildlife, to protect a critical part of America's natural heritage, and to support all of the communities, which we represent.

Again, I thank the witnesses for testifying today and look forward to learning more about this important issue.

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Dr. FLEMING. I thank the gentleman, the Ranking Member. We will now hear from our witnesses. Like all witnesses, your written testimony will appear in full in the hearing record. So I ask that you keep your oral statements to five minutes as outlined in our invitation letter to you, and under Committee Rule 4[a].

Our microphones are not automatic, and so please press the button when you are ready to begin, and likewise, when you are done, press it as well, unless you want the world to hear what is on your mind.

I also want to explain how timing lights work. When you begin to speak, our Clerk will start the timer, and a green light will appear. After four minutes the yellow light will appear, and at that time, you should begin to conclude your statement.

At five minutes the red light will come on. You may complete your sentence, but at that time, I must ask that you stop. I would now like to welcome Mr. James W. Kurth, Acting Assistant Director of the National Wildlife Refuge System, for the Fish and Wildlife Service; Mrs. Jamie Rappaport Clark, former Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and now Executive Vice President of Defenders of Wildlife; Mr. Dan Forster, Director, Wildlife Resources Division for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources; Mrs. Susan Recce, Director of the Division of Conservation for the Institute for Legislative Action, at the National Rifle Association; and Mr. William P. Horn, former Assistant Secretary of the Interior, and former Chairman of the National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Commission, and Counsel for the United States Sportsmen's Alliance, who he is representing today. Mr. Kurth of the Fish and Wildlife Service is now recognized. You may begin, sir.

**STATEMENT OF JAMES W. KURTH, ACTING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM, UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**

Mr. KURTH. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Jim Kurth. I am the Acting Assistant Director for the National Wildlife Refuge System, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the important conservation work of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The National Wildlife Refuges conserve some of the most outstanding wildlife habitat in the world, and a stunning array of fish and wildlife. Most refuges, however, are fragments of what were once much larger landscapes.

Natural ecological functions, such as wildfires, and periodic flooding, that maintain high quality wildlife habitats, are often disrupted now. This requires us to actively manage refuges.

The management, or operations of National Wildlife Refuges, include many practices, including such things as prescribed fire, manipulation of water levels and managed impoundments, controlling invasive species, grazing, farming, and much more.

Our refuge operational accounts also fund refuge law enforcement, visitor services, and volunteer management, and comprehensive conservation planning. Our operational needs total \$676 million.

We have reduced that from a previous estimate of \$1.2 billion by using a model that includes only our highest priority staffing and critical project needs. If we don't fund some of this work, like controlling invasive species, the problem gets worse and future costs are higher.

Other operational needs are unfunded, and missed opportunities to deliver more effective conservation, and better serve the public. We maximize the effectiveness of our funding through close partnerships with State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and with an army of 42,000 volunteers.

We constantly are looking for partnership opportunities to leverage these resources. Managing refuges requires infrastructure. The refuge system has infrastructure worth \$24 billion, and much of this infrastructure is directly related to providing high quality habitat.

Water control structures, levees, and water delivery systems, represent 34 percent of our constructed assets, roads that are important for access and for fire management, account for nearly 50 percent of those assets.

We have a \$2.7 billion backlog of deferred maintenance on these facilities. The cost estimate for our deferred maintenance backlog has grown substantially over the last decade. This is in large part because we have undertaken more systematic and professional condition assessments, and have used industry standard cost estimating tools.

In addition, damages from natural disasters like hurricanes and the recent North Dakota floods, have contributed \$241 million to the backlog just since 2005. The ongoing flooding along the Mississippi River will have a significant impact as well, as more than 570,000 acres on 27 refuges are currently under water.

While the cost estimate of the maintenance backlog has grown, we believe that the condition of our facilities has improved over the past decade because of the investments that we have made, but we still have a lot of work to do.

Some question how much land acquisition the Service should be doing when we already have a large backlog of work on the lands that we already own. Purchasing land in existing refuge often lowers the cost of operations. Contiguous blocks of refuge lands makes it easier to post boundaries, to manage fires, to provide access and

recreational opportunities than on refuges where the ownership is more scattered.

Finding the right balance on how much more land we purchase requires our most thoughtful consideration and discernment. But conserving high quality habitat for fish and wildlife is what we do in the refuge system. If we hadn't protected special places, like the Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge along the Texas coast, the whooping crane may not have survived.

Without the National Key Deer Refuge, we would likely have no Key Deer. Many bird species in grasslands, and arid lands, and forests, are declining across the country according to our most recent State of the Birds Report.

Wetland birds, however, particularly waterfowl, are doing quite well, and the primary reason why waterfowl are doing well is our decades of work protecting millions of acres of waterfowl habitat throughout the flyways as National Wildlife Refuges.

Mr. Chairman, we look forward to continuing to work with the Committee as we plan together the thoughtful stewardship of the National Wildlife Refuge System. I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kurth follows:]

**Statement of Jim Kurth, Acting Assistant Director, National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior**

Good morning Chairman Fleming and members of the Subcommittee. I am Jim Kurth, acting Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on the important work funded by the National Wildlife Refuge System's operations and maintenance accounts, and on the tools we use to protect America's wildlife and natural areas.

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. The Refuge System is the world's premier network of public lands devoted to the conservation of wildlife and habitat, and offers about 44 million annual visitors the opportunity to fish, hunt, observe and photograph wildlife, and learn about nature through environmental education and interpretation. And with its widespread presence and history of working with partners, the Refuge System also plays a key role in supporting innovative community-level efforts to conserve outdoor spaces and to reconnect people to the outdoors through the Administration's America's Great Outdoors initiative.

The Refuge System includes over 150 million acres of land and water; natural gems that Americans have protected for themselves and their children. The Refuge System is a diverse land, wetland, and ocean conservation system spanning more than half the planet—from Guam, American Samoa, and other remote Pacific islands, north to the high arctic in northern Alaska, east to the rugged coastline of Maine and south to the tropical U.S. Virgin Islands. National wildlife refuges are found in every U.S. state. In total, the Refuge System now contains 553 refuges and 38 wetland management districts.

The presence of a national wildlife refuge in a community offers significant economic benefit in the form of jobs and visitor spending in local stores, hotels, and service stations. According to a Service analysis entitled *Banking on Nature 2006: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation*, refuge visitors generated \$1.7 billion of annual sales to local economies, of which 87% was spent by travelers from outside the local area. The ripple effect from these visitors created over 27,000 jobs and more than \$543 million in employment income.

But the Refuge System is just a part of a growing and massive outdoor recreation business sector. According to the *National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*, 33.9 million Americans spent a combined total of \$76.7 billion on hunting and fishing in 2006. Even more popular, wildlife watching was enjoyed

by 71.1 million Americans, who spent \$45.7 billion. Moreover, research has shown that permanently protected land in the vicinity of developed areas significantly increases property values. A substantial number of national wildlife refuges are located in and around cities, and in places where development is rapidly occurring. It is clear that Americans place high value on wild lands and healthy populations of fish and wildlife. In addition to economic benefits, refuges provide many environmental services for communities. For example, refuges can filter rainwater before it enters municipal supplies, reduce flooding by slowing excess surface runoff, and attenuate storm surges before they reach coastal homes and businesses. Finally, refuges place relatively few demands on local infrastructure when compared to more intensive development.

Because national wildlife refuges offer substantial economic benefit and unparalleled wildlife experiences, it's no surprise they enjoy broad public support. Advocacy groups as diverse as the National Rifle Association, The Wilderness Society, Safari Club International, and National Audubon Society, among many others, all agree that the Refuge System is a unique American treasure worthy of continued investment. But the Refuge System is facing tremendous challenges—from the threats placed upon wildlife by habitat destruction, non-native species, and a rapidly changing climate, to a dwindling interest in the outdoors by many young Americans. The Service is already responding to these challenges, while also working to cultivate the support of both traditional and new constituencies, particularly diverse, urban youth. To amplify our efforts and hone our approach, the Refuge System is now spearheading a collaborative effort that aims to craft a progressive vision for wildlife conservation in America. We call it *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation*.

*Conserving the Future* will help ensure that the Refuge System is on track to achieve its mission, while being prepared to meet the challenges of our changing world. The Service has been encouraging everyone—wildlife watchers, outdoor educators, hunters, anglers, youth, Service employees, refuge Friends groups, other conservation partners and concerned citizens—to participate in shaping the Refuge System's future. These efforts will ensure that the resources of the Refuge System are used in a prioritized and efficient manner to reach the Service's goals as well as outcomes our constituencies are asking for—such as, continued hunting and fishing opportunities, wilderness experiences, restoration of degraded lands, thriving wildlife populations, among many others.

In order to achieve these outcomes, the Service uses a variety of approaches, such as actively managing and restoring wildlife habitats, offering technical and financial assistance to private landowners, and building public support through volunteer programs. One of the most effective approaches is the protection of important wildlife habitats via land acquisition or conservation easements. In America, lands with some form of legal protection are highly fragmented. Many species, such as salmon or Florida panthers, try their best to navigate barriers, including hydroelectric dams and 10-lane interstates, but are usually unsuccessful and are therefore their populations are vulnerable. When the Refuge System acquires new properties, species such as these benefit from the renewed connection between protected parcels. These acquisitions are good for wildlife, but they're also good for people because the Refuge System only acquires lands in easement or fee title from willing landowners who are paid market value for their land. For these people, putting an easement on their property or selling it to the Refuge System guarantees that the land they love will forever remain just as they know it; preserved for their children and grandchildren.

In recent years, a new model of conservation has begun to find success in certain parts of the rural U.S. That is, a model that finds shared objectives between the needs of wildlife and those interested in maintaining traditional working lands, such as for livestock grazing and haying. Private landowners, conservation groups, states and the federal government are all working together to protect America's special places. For example, in the Rocky Mountain Front and Blackfoot Valley of central Montana, people are working cooperatively to protect one of the most special places left in the Rockies—an area that preserves ranching lifestyles while maintaining critical corridors for grizzly bears and other animals to make their seasonal migrations. Similarly, in the Flint Hills of eastern Kansas, people are collaborating to protect an area that is home to some of the last remaining tallgrass prairie in America. With over 96% of this globally rare ecosystem already destroyed, preserving what's left ensures room for wildlife to roam while preserving the rich agricultural heritage of the region. It's truly a win-win-win when voluntary conservation easements designed to protect more than 100 species of grassland birds and 500 plants simultaneously preserve land ownership and property rights for participating landowners, and keep these properties on local tax rolls.

Overwhelmingly, Americans support conservation initiatives, even in the face of economic hardship. Since 1988, Americans have voted to raise \$56 billion for land conservation through bonds, property or sales tax increases, or other financial mechanisms. Ballot initiatives have passed in 43 states to date, with an overall passage rate of nearly 76%, or 1,740 out of 2,299 initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Refuge System's Operations and Maintenance Accounts**

The Refuge System prioritizes its project spending in alignment with its overall strategic goals. Our staff and funding conserve an extraordinary amount of species and ecosystems. Currently, the Service is tracking about \$3.3 billion in operational needs and deferred maintenance projects, including about \$650 million in operations and \$2.7 billion in maintenance. It is important to note that the \$2.7 billion in maintenance reflects the total amount of projects required to bring all assets up to excellent conditions.

Managing the Refuge System is not unlike running a large company with hundreds of branch offices. It requires simultaneous attention to both national and local issues, and a diverse and highly trained workforce that must work together for the entire operation to run smoothly. Our workforce contains mostly biologists and professional wildlife managers, but also contains professional educators, law enforcement officers, heavy equipment operators, fire fighters, real estate appraisers, IT and cartography professionals, budget specialists, and more than a few pilots and boat captains. With fewer than 4,000 employees working at more than 380 locations spanning all U.S. states and territories, and with only \$3.35 for every acre we manage, the Refuge System must work hard to ensure its operations are efficient.

### **Operations Account**

The Refuge System spends Operations money on activities that contribute to meeting our mission. These are the activities that keep land and water in suitable condition for wildlife, and provide safe access and recreational opportunities for visitors. For budget purposes, the Refuge System organizes its operational activities into four areas: Wildlife and Habitat Management, Visitor Services, Law Enforcement, and Conservation Planning. A database—the Refuge Operating Needs System (RONS)—catalogs outstanding operational projects, including the staff and equipment necessary to perform routine management activities. From a refuge manager's perspective, projects in RONS represent the prospective work and people to get the job done. These funding increases are for monitoring, restoring, and protecting wildlife and their habitats, supporting wildlife-dependent recreation, ensuring a safe environment for people and wildlife, and creating strategic plans with extensive public involvement that ensure a collaborative approach to conservation.

The continual improvements being made to RONS have allowed the Refuge System to be strategic in its allocations by identifying and prioritizing operational funding increases. While RONS previously indicated approximately \$1 billion in project funding, careful analysis in the past two years has reduced this figure, primarily by removing lower priority projects. Making these choices has allowed the Refuge System to focus on only the highest priority needs. Currently, RONS contains 5,349 projects that describe a combined total of approximately \$650 million. A portion of these "projects" actually represent additional staff. Such staffing calculations were developed from two staffing models, both of which used measurable and objective workload drivers to predict number and location of staff. One model, the *Law Enforcement Deployment Model*, was developed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and determined the number of law enforcement officers to ensure visitor, staff, and resource protection. The IACP called for 845 officers. Currently the Refuge System has approximately 213 officers. The second model—*Staffing Model for Field Stations in the Refuge System, June 2008*—calculated the necessary non-law enforcement positions at refuges across the country.

The majority of Operations funding is spent on wildlife and habitat management. These activities are at the core of what the Refuge System does. For example, at Blackwater NWR in Maryland and at many other refuges, freshwater impoundments are managed with dikes, pumps, canals, water control structures, and even prescribed fire to obtain ideal conditions for waterfowl and shorebirds.

Another example of important management funded with Operations dollars is found in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in southern Texas, where refuge lands are restored with operations funds. Here, in one of the most diverse plant and animal communities in the entire U.S., more than 95% of the native vegetation has been cleared for agriculture and other development. Still, more than 500 bird and 300 butterfly species, including some of the rarest in America, have been documented

<sup>1</sup>LandVote 2010 by *The Trust for Public Land and Land Trust Alliance*

in this four-county area. Owing to the biological richness preserved by the three national wildlife refuges here, southern Texas has become one of the premier eco-tourism destinations in the country. However, Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR alone has more than 110 disconnected parcels—many of which were purchased as farmland and restored back to native vegetation—scattered along the final 200 miles of the river. This arrangement may be okay for winged critters like birds and bats, but it presents huge barriers to animals that walk, slither, or hop. Strategically acquiring lands from willing sellers and restoring those lands with operations dollars connects habitats, improves water quality, and helps nearby Texas cities and towns thrive with the 600,000 annual visitors attracted to this natural spectacle. These visitors generate approximately \$150 million for the local economy, which is substantial given the median household income in the area is only \$27,000.

Operations funding also allows for proactive work that actually saves money in the long run. For example, non-native invasive species (e.g., nutria, kudzu, cheat grass, and verbicina) have a foothold nearly everywhere in America. These invaders cost us dearly, in terms of money but also reduced forage for livestock, increased fuel for catastrophic wildfires, and degraded wildlife habitat. The most effective approach when battling invasive species is to detect and eradicate them early, before they gain a strong foothold and spread quickly. Operations money funds this critical work, which not only safeguards refuge lands but also surrounding private property.

#### **Maintenance Account**

In addition to operational work, the Refuge System also allocates funding to important maintenance projects. The Refuge System has an extensive array of constructed facility assets that are vital to achieving the System's mission. A database known as the Service Asset and Maintenance Management System (SAMMS) catalogs projects for more than 45,000 assets, which are collectively valued at about \$24 billion. About 35% of the value of this investment is in water management structures which aid in managing wetland impoundments for an array of wildlife and recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, and birding. Nearly 50% is invested in roads, trails, bridges, and parking areas, allowing our employees to access areas for management and research, and facilitating access for visitors. About 11% is invested in buildings that provide office space, labs, visitor space, residences, and storage for vehicles, equipment, and various supplies. The remaining 6% of our infrastructure is comprised of items such as small-scale visitor facilities, radio and communication systems, docks/piers for equipment transport, and various other items.

About a decade ago, the Refuge System began a more structured approach to managing its constructed assets, and in general the condition of our facilities is now much improved. Our data show an improving trend in the facility condition index for our buildings, water management assets, and transportation assets. We initiated comprehensive condition assessments that are completed every five years by specialists trained in estimating repair costs. Five-year budget plans were developed to prioritize funding over multiple years using a criteria-based ranking approach. Collectively, these efforts have allowed us to gain a much more detailed and accurate understanding of the condition of our assets and the costs to adequately address maintenance. In the last 10 years or so, the list of deferred maintenance projects appeared to grow considerably, from about \$600 million to about \$2.7 billion. However, much of this growth is a result of more complete and accurate information rather than changes in asset condition. It's also noteworthy that the maintenance backlog has remained relatively stable at \$2.5 to \$2.7 billion for the last four years.

Importantly, however, these more detailed cataloging efforts have had the effect of producing a number which reflects the total amount of projects required to bring all assets up to excellent conditions rather than to keep the condition of the most important components of key assets at a sustainable level.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act) allowed many important projects to be completed. This funding represented an important investment that helped maintain the critical buildings, levees, water control structures, and more, that we need to meet both the biological and visitor-related goals of the Refuge System. The Refuge System received approximately \$212 million in funding from the Recovery Act: 60% was devoted to existing facilities, 29% to new facilities, 8% to habitat improvement projects, and 2% to youth employment.

Whether through Recovery Act funding or annual appropriations, the Refuge System uses its available funds in strategic ways for the highest priority projects. We use a variety of methods to leverage available resources and promote the wise use of taxpayer dollars. These include pooling resources with our partners and between refuges, renting rather than purchasing construction equipment where appropriate, organizing maintenance action teams composed of staff who can complete projects

for less than contractors, employing youth to assist with routine maintenance tasks, developing a corps of more than 42,000 volunteers who contribute nearly 1.5 million hours of work annually, and other means to find the most cost effective way to complete projects.

The Refuge System has some atypical assets within its overall maintenance program. Our road system is not a well-defined system of paved highways but is instead a collection of mostly “native surfaced” roadways often located in environmentally sensitive areas, which are subject to flooding. These roads may have been built, for example, as an addition to a levee project and may be under-designed or unsuitable for substantial vehicular traffic. Determining how best to maintain such roads is challenging both in terms of design and reliable and consistent forecasting of long-term maintenance costs. In the last decade, funding through the surface transportation authorization bill has made a significant improvement to the condition of refuge roads. Another asset challenge is management of infrastructure on our many island refuges in remote areas of the Pacific Ocean, such as Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. Costs to mobilize a construction crew at Midway are very expensive (generally over \$100,000 per event) and Midway alone has identified over \$210 million in deferred maintenance projects.

In addition, damages from natural disasters, such as floods, drought or hurricanes affect many refuges—especially those in coastal or riverine zones. Refuges around the country are frequently in the crosshairs of natural disasters, whether hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the North Dakota floods of 2009, or the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. These events have had a substantial effect on Refuge System maintenance.

Since 2000, seven former military sites have been transferred to the Refuge System. With these properties comes the cost of demolition, management, and public safety. The current deferred maintenance and demolition costs for projects on these seven former military sites is \$65.5 million.

In summary, the Refuge System has made significant progress in the last decade with regard to refining and improving its maintenance program. We have made great strides toward a more thorough understanding of costs and needs, and are focusing funds toward the highest priority needs.

#### **Acquisition of Fee-Title Land or Conservation Easements Can Help Decrease Operations and Maintenance Costs**

Without question, providing high-quality stewardship of the nation’s wildlife refuges takes significant resources, and refuge managers must make maintenance decisions within a prioritized framework to ensure key assets remain at sustainable levels. The Refuge System sometimes faces questions about how its operations and maintenance backlog relate to its pursuit of acquiring new fee-title land or conservation easements.

The Refuge System, as part of its official charge from Congress, has a mandate to “. . . conserve fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats. . . .” One of the most effective ways to do this is to protect areas that hold the greatest value for wildlife. This approach—acquiring rights to land and water—is a clear priority for both Congress and the majority of Americans who support preserving open space and wildlife, as evidenced by the public comments at the Administration’s America’s Great Outdoors sessions held last summer throughout the country. Investment in newly conserved properties provides more access for hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers; creates jobs and economic benefit to local communities; increases survival of wildlife; and helps private landowners preserve their family lands and lifestyle, such as ranching, in perpetuity. Any one of these reasons alone is a strong justification for conserving irreplaceable lands—in some cases, remnants of the last places on Earth where certain habitats exist, such as tallgrass prairie in the Flint Hills of Kansas. But an equally compelling reason to purchase land or acquire easements is that consolidating fragmented lands often *reduces* operations and maintenance needs, thereby saving taxpayer dollars.

Most new acquisitions or conservation easements acquired by the Refuge System simply serve to fill in the gaps. Many are private inholdings within or immediately adjacent to an existing refuge parcel. Private inholdings may seem of small consequence, especially if the majority of the surrounding land is already legally protected and managed for wildlife. But those scattered and sometimes small inholdings can have a disproportionate and often adverse effect on the ability of a refuge to achieve its purpose. In a real way, strategic acquisitions or easements can significantly simplify management and reduce expenses related to signage, fencing, law enforcement patrols, legal permits, rights-of-way conflicts, fire fighting, road maintenance, habitat management and restoration, fighting invasive species, and meet important conservation objectives.

For example, at Laguna Atascosa NWR in Texas, acquisition of a tract already bordered on three sides by the refuge would result in significant savings in terms of reduced law enforcement patrols and maintenance, and improved management effectiveness. The refuge would no longer require: maintenance for over 3 miles of fencing, which would save nearly \$200,000 over about 15 years; personnel to respond to frequent cattle trespassing; or maintenance of fire breaks. In addition, the acquisition would significantly improve the refuge's ability to properly manage most of the water in the Bahia Grande basins.

The Refuge System doesn't only acquire land to benefit wildlife, people, and to streamline management and save money—we also contribute to national security and a well-trained military. For example, Fort A.P. Hill is one of the largest military installations on the East Coast, but is located in a rapidly growing area in northern Virginia. Urban and suburban development has become a major challenge for military installations nationwide. Incompatible development—primarily residential housing and stores—close to an installation's boundary can limit training and other military operations. And so, in 2009, Fort A.P. Hill, using its Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program, partnered with nearby Rappahannock River Valley NWR and other partners to cost-share the preservation of adjacent lands that hold conservation and historic value. The ACUB program benefits military installations by providing buffers between the installations and neighboring communities. This enables the Army to more fully utilize the installations for military purpose. In the case of Fort A.P. Hill nearly 3,000 acres were preserved—a situation good for wildlife and the preparedness of our nation's military.

#### **Conclusion**

The Refuge System is nothing if not creative and focused. Creative in its use of partnerships to achieve an impressive amount of conservation work, and focused in its wise use of limited resources to get the highest-priority jobs done. While we always strive for a prioritized, efficient approach, it is true that higher budgets allow us to get more conservation done, and provide higher quality services to visitors. And during lean times, we are able to make the tough choices by prioritizing and using our resources efficiently, while continuing our commitment to excellent public service.

The Refuge System continues to seek ways to streamline management and find efficiencies. We have many ways to accomplish this, but one of the most effective ways is to remember, and act upon, the foresight and wisdom that Congress showed more than a decade ago, when in 1997 the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act ordered the growth of “. . . the System in a manner that is best designed to accomplish the mission of the System. . . to contribute to the conservation of the ecosystems of the United States. . . .”

We appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to this important issue and hope we can cooperate to identify solutions that address our highest priority needs while still allowing the Refuge System to meet its mission.

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Dr. FLEMING. I thank you, Mr. Kurth, for your testimony. Next, we have Ms. Clark of the Defenders of Wildlife. You are now recognized for five minutes.

#### **STATEMENT OF JAMIE RAPPAPORT CLARK, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE**

Ms. CLARK. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Jamie Rappaport Clark, Executive Vice President of the Defenders of Wildlife, and I really appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

Defenders has more than a million members and supporters, and is dedicated to the protection and restoration of all wild animals and plants in their natural communities. As such, we have been involved in the National Wildlife Refuge System law and policy for decades.

We also work to secure strong investments in refuges as a member of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement. As the only Federal land system in the United States dedicated primarily to wildlife conservation, the refuge system is of paramount



importance to all Americans, especially the 40 million people who, like me, enjoy refuges each year for vacation destinations, or a break from the everyday city work life that we are all wrapped up in.

Having served as Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service from 1987 to 2001, I am very familiar with the causes and implications of the Refuge System's operations and maintenance backlog, and don't take them lightly.

The growth of the now \$3.3 billion backlog is due to consistent budget shortfalls which forces unfunded projects into the growing list of deferred operations and maintenance work.

CARE has estimated that the refuge system needs at least \$900 million annually to support and to adequately meet its annual program costs. Yet, at its highest funding levels, it reached only about \$503 million in 2010.

Because appropriations typically fail to cover increases in the annual fixed costs—utilities, rent, fuel, things like that—funding to pay for these rising expenses is deferred from important programs, further adding to the backlog.

As a result, Refuges are severely understaffed as you mentioned, and lack the resources to get ahead of today's conservation challenges, which are quite daunting. Visitor facilities go without needed maintenance, and employees struggle to maintain even existing recreational opportunities.

Yet, not surprisingly in today's society, the number of refuge visitors keeps growing. With visitors spending estimated to contribute \$1.7 billion annually to local communities, stronger Congressional investments in the refuge system would pay even greater dividends to the local gateway communities and local economies.

But there is hope. Recent increases in funding and improvements, and in oversight and management efficiencies, as Mr. Kurth mentioned, have reduced the operations backlog by more than \$300 million, and have kept the maintenance backlog steady at about \$2.7 billion for several years.

I will offer the following recommendations to build on this success. First, it is critical that Congress work each year to approach a funding level that at the minimum covers the Refuge System's annual operating needs, and the annual needs adjusted upwards, to account for the rising fixed costs that happen every year.

Second, Congress should highlight funding of critically needed staff positions that enable refuges to leverage additional resources. As an example, the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex in California has effectively tripled its annual operating budget by engaging other stakeholders.

At many refuges, however, personnel are generally spread too thin to even be able to capitalize on similar opportunities. Third, Congress and the Administration should build on the Refuge System's newly initiated inventory and monitoring program.

Collecting baseline data and tracking trends on each refuge is essential to accurately determine priority management and funding needs so that the dollars that are available are directed to where they will be most effective and have long range conservation gains.

Standardizing data collection and information management needs among the various agencies as well will make this even more

useful. Finally, Congress and the Administration must continue to invest in land acquisition, which benefits the American people by safeguarding clean air and water, and providing space for the important outdoor recreation needs, protecting vital wildlife habitat and supporting local economies.

Many acquisitions require little or no subsequent investment, and some actually reduce operations and maintenance costs by streamlining management efforts. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a vital part of America's natural heritage.

Continuing to invest by reducing the operations and maintenance backlog, and making critically important land acquisition investments will pay dividends for our children and future generations. Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspectives on this critical issue, and I am happy to respond to questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Clark follows:]

**Statement of Jamie Rappaport Clark, Executive Vice President,  
Defenders of Wildlife**

Mister Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I am Jamie Rappaport Clark, Executive Vice President of Defenders of Wildlife ("Defenders"). I greatly appreciate this opportunity to testify on behalf of Defenders today.

Founded in 1947, Defenders has more than one million supporters across the nation and is dedicated to the protection and restoration of all wild animals and plants in their natural communities. Defenders has been substantively involved in National Wildlife Refuge System law and policy for decades, and actively worked for passage of legislation that culminated in the landmark National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 ("Refuge Improvement Act"). Defenders has also been a leading voice in the formulation of national policy guidance issued since passage of the Refuge Improvement Act, including policies addressing planning, compatibility and appropriateness of secondary uses, biological integrity, diversity and environmental health, wilderness, and recreational use. In addition, since 1995, Defenders has been an active member of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement ("CARE"), a diverse coalition of 21 organizations, including the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the National Rifle Association, and the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance. Representing more than 14 million Americans, CARE works to educate Congress and the American public about the Refuge System and to secure strong investments in the valuable wildlife, lands, and waters it protects.

As the only federal land system in the U.S. dedicated primarily to the conservation of wildlife and habitat, the Refuge System is of paramount importance to Defenders and to all Americans, especially the more than 40 million people who visit and enjoy national wildlife refuges each year. Having also served as Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ("Service") from 1997 to 2001 after a career in federal service as a wildlife biologist first with the Department of the Army and then with the Service, I am very familiar with the causes and implications of the Refuge System's operations and maintenance backlog. In my testimony, I will highlight these subjects, as well as offer some suggestions for addressing the backlog.

**The Growth of the Backlog**

The Refuge System's estimated operations and maintenance backlog has grown from approximately \$1 billion in 1996 to its current total of \$3.3 billion. There are several causes of this rapid growth. Most important to recognize is the System's chronic and severe underfunding. With appropriations that have consistently failed to cover annual program needs, unfunded projects have been forced onto the growing list of deferred operations and maintenance projects. The longer a project is delayed, the higher the cost of funding it later.

Also largely unaccounted for in appropriations have been annual increases needed to cover rising fixed costs, including salaries, utilities, rent, and fuel. CARE estimates that the Refuge System needs at least \$15 million each year just to keep up with these annual fixed costs. But as funding fails to include these adjustments, money to pay for these rising costs must be diverted from habitat management, visitor services, law enforcement, maintenance, or other programs, further adding to the extensive backlog.

Finally, the magnitude of the backlog's growth since 1996 is misleading, as some of the increase can be attributed to changes in quantifying the System's facilities.

Earlier calculations were based on inconsistent assessments that failed to account for basic assets such as roads and levees. By implementing a more comprehensive and standardized approach, the Refuge System now has more accurate records of its facilities, helping to correct earlier underestimates of true maintenance needs.

#### **Impacts of the Backlog**

At \$3.3 billion, the current backlog has left personnel struggling to uphold the System's mission to conserve wildlife for the American public, as well as to harness its full potential as an economic driver of local communities. At the end of FY 2010, nearly 12,800 refuge facilities were overdue for scheduled maintenance or replacement, accounting for a maintenance backlog totaling more than \$2.7 billion. The operations backlog, at close to \$677 million, consisted of approximately 5,600 project needs, including important staff positions; more than half of these needs are considered critical to the System's mission.

These deficiencies have clearly taken a toll on the Refuge System. Refuges do not have the resources to treat millions of acres infested with invasive plants and animals. The staff of law enforcement officers, numbering 213, is barely one-quarter of the 845 officers recommended by the International Association of Chiefs of Police in a 2005 analysis. In many cases, the System has coped with funding shortfalls by grouping several refuge units into a single complex, allowing staff and resources to be shared, though they are generally spread too thin to adequately address management needs.

The impacts extend to the public as well. Funding shortfalls have meant that many visitor facilities go without needed maintenance or repairs, sometimes posing risks to public safety. Severe staffing shortages also hamstring efforts to expand or even maintain existing visitor use opportunities such as wildlife observation, hunting, fishing, and environmental education. Despite these challenges, a steadily growing number of refuge visitors, approximately 45 million in FY 2010, indicates that the Refuge System has only begun to scratch the surface of its true potential to attract the public. Furthermore, with the Service's *Banking on Nature* report estimating that spending by refuge visitors in 2006 contributed \$1.7 billion to local communities alone, Defenders believes that stronger congressional investments in the Refuge System would pay even greater dividends by further improving the health of these local economies.

#### **Addressing the Backlog**

While the backlog may appear insurmountable and has undoubtedly held the Refuge System back from fully delivering on its conservation and public use goals, progress has been made. Steady increases in the operations and maintenance budget between FY 2008 and FY 2010 have helped the System to not only keep pace with rising costs, but also begin to make progress on some of the management challenges that have held it back from reaching its full potential. Funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act have also supported important projects on the maintenance backlog, which has held relatively steady at about \$2.7 billion during the past several years. Meanwhile, the operations backlog actually declined by more than \$300 million as a result of utilizing new staffing models, updating project information, and securing partnership opportunities.

These trends show that the combined efforts of the Administration and Congress can have meaningful, positive impacts on this backlog. Defenders urges the subcommittee to consider the following recommendations to build on these important steps forward.

#### **Provide Annual Funding that Matches Annual Needs**

CARE has estimated that the Refuge System needs at least \$900 million to adequately meet its annual program costs. Yet, its highest funding level reached only \$503 million in FY 2010. To prevent new projects from worsening the backlog, Congress must work to approach a funding level that, at a minimum, covers the Refuge System's annual needs. Each year, that funding must also be adjusted upward to account for rising fixed costs that would otherwise erode the System's ability to maintain a consistent level of management from one year to the next.

#### **Support Partnerships and Volunteer Opportunities**

With many refuges severely understaffed, available personnel are generally spread too thin to capitalize on partnership opportunities that could otherwise improve volunteer involvement and leveraging of additional resources. In contrast, for example, San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex in central California, being comparatively well staffed, has been known to effectively triple its annual budget by engaging in partnerships with other interested stakeholders. These extra resources have enabled staff to accomplish more of its restoration work, treat more

acres of invasive species, and provide more successful hunting programs for the public. This situation demonstrates the great potential that exists when sufficient staffing is available to foster such partnerships, and how much is being lost at other wildlife refuges without adequate staffing. We urge Congress to fund critically needed positions that will provide more refuges the capacity to harness opportunities like those at the San Luis Refuge Complex.

**Advance a Coordinated Inventory and Monitoring Program**

The Service must continue working to identify opportunities to improve its management efficiency, which should include building on the Refuge System's newly initiated inventory and monitoring program. Collecting baseline data and tracking trends on each refuge is essential to more accurately determine management and funding needs so that dollars can be directed toward the highest-priority actions.

Standardizing data collection and information management across all Service regions and among the various federal land management agencies will maximize the efficiency with which data can be analyzed and shared, as well as ensure that data will continue to be useful over time. Congress should work with the Administration to develop a streamlined and coordinated approach to inventory and monitoring work.

**Continue to Invest in Wildlife Conservation and Ecosystem Services through Critically Important Land Acquisition**

The Refuge Improvement Act, passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, directs the Secretary of the Interior to "plan and direct the continued growth of the System in a manner that is best designed to accomplish the mission of the System, to contribute to the conservation of the ecosystems of the United States, to complement efforts of States and other Federal agencies to conserve fish and wildlife and their habitats, and to increase support for the System and participation from conservation partners and the public." In addition to protecting crucial wildlife habitat across an increasingly fragmented landscape, Defenders believes that land acquisition is a profitable investment that benefits the American public by safeguarding clean air and water supplies, providing space for outdoor recreation, and supporting local economies.

Inholdings, in particular, provide great potential to directly address operations and maintenance costs. As refuges incrementally acquire land within their acquisition boundaries, private inholdings often leave a patchwork of protected land that creates challenges for activities such as invasive species control and fire management. Acquiring these lands from willing sellers improves habitat connectivity, in turn helping to reduce future federal management efforts and costs.

**Conclusion**

The National Wildlife Refuge System is a vital part of America's natural heritage, conserving wildlife, providing clean water and other ecosystem services, affording abundant opportunities for hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation activities, and serving as a living laboratory for environmental education and science. Continuing to invest in the System today by reducing the operations and maintenance backlog and making critically important land acquisitions will pay tremendous dividends for our children and future generations. Defenders of Wildlife stands ready to work with Congress and the Administration to find efficient and cost-effective ways to reduce the Refuge System's operations and maintenance backlog. I thank you for the opportunity to share my perspectives on this critical issue, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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Dr. FLEMING. Thank you, Ms. Clark. Next is Mr. Dan Forster, of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. You are now recognized for five minutes, sir.

**STATEMENT OF DAN FORSTER, DIRECTOR, WILDLIFE RESOURCES DIVISION, GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

Mr. FORSTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to share perspectives of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies on the operations and maintenance backlog within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

I am Dan Forster, and I serve as the Director of the Wildlife Resources Division with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and am Vice Chairman of the Executive Committee for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

The Association, and the 50 individual State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, have had a longstanding interest and involvement in the National Wildlife Refuge System, and were instrumental in deliberations leading to the passage of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act.

The Refuge System has a long history of important contributions to conservation of our Nation's fish and wildlife resources, and support some of the fish and wildlife habitats in the country, as well as outstanding hunting and fishing opportunities.

Refuges are also important to the local communities for wildlife dependent recreation. Our Association has consistently supported appropriate increases to the Fish and Wildlife Service's budget, and our appropriations recommendations provided to Congress each year, but let me acknowledge what we all know, which is that this is a stringent fiscal involvement in which we find ourselves.

And the States are struggling financially as well. So we understand the budget constraints to which we seek to advance conservation. I would suggest that these circumstances compel even greater cooperation between the Service and the respective State Fish and Wildlife Agencies in order to prioritize fish and wildlife conservation needs, while continuing priority public uses on the National Wildlife Refuges.

Let me reflect for a moment in Georgia. In my own State, the nine wildlife refuges, comprising half-a-million acres, are managed with just 44 staff positions. That is a shortfall of 48 permanent and 18 temporary positions as identified in the refuge system's 2009 national staffing model.

The staffing shortage for permanent positions exceeds 50 percent. Without adequate in-house labor, small projects, such as repairing a boardwalk, simply don't get done in a timely manner.

And tough priority-based decisions are being made concerning roads, trails, water impoundments, hatcheries, and other facilities, that impact the quality of a visitor's experience, and sometimes their safety.

In Georgia, the current backlog for deferred maintenance is 56.3 million, and additionally, there are more than 90 mission-critical habitat projects totaling over 10 million that remain unfunded in our State.

And while Georgia has not had to endure the wrath of catastrophes like our neighbors in southeastern States from hurricanes, oil spills, or floods, we have endured extended droughts and wildfires.

Even today a wildfire in Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge has burned more than 145,000 acres and is not yet fully contained. Such catastrophic events further inhibit the Service's ability to complete day-to-day maintenance work, and each crisis stretches every available equipment operator, maintenance technician, and biologist from our respective agencies.

And as a Service my agency in Georgia continues to struggle to do more with less, we are forging innovative partnerships to accom-

plish common goals. We are working together on a greenway-blueway project in the heart of Georgia near Piedmont and Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuges to conserve land and water.

On the coast, we are working cooperatively through the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, and the Atlantic Flyway Council to conserve migratory bird habitats, while enhancing bird watching and hunting on private lands, and State lands, as well as refuge lands.

And, finally, we joined forces with the Service and others in the fledgling South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative. We believe that the LLC's collaborative science based approach to large scale conservation efforts is the best way to ensure that we are spending the right dollars in the right place.

And as Congress considers how to address the refuge backlog, I would certainly ask that you look favorably upon resource needs of some of these important partnerships as well.

Let me conclude simply by reiterating that cooperation with the State Fish and Wildlife Agencies can result in improved deficiencies, but States need to be engaged early by the Service to meet both the local refuge mission, but also contribute to the conservation objectives of the State Fish and Wildlife Agency.

Mr. Chairman, I am honored to be here before you today. I appreciate the chance to speak, and would be happy to address any questions that you may have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Forster follows:]

**Statement of Dan Forster, Director, Wildlife Resources Division,  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to share the perspectives of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies on the operations and maintenance backlog within the National Wildlife Refuge System. I am Dan Forster, Director of the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division and Vice Chair of the Executive Committee of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. All 50 states are members of the Association.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies promotes and facilitates sound fish and wildlife management and conservation, and is the collective voice of North America's fish and wildlife agencies. The Association provides its member agencies and their senior staff with coordination services that range from migratory birds, fish, habitat, and invasive species, to conservation education, leadership development, and international relations. The Association represents its state fish and wildlife agency members on Capitol Hill and before the Administration on key conservation and management policies, and works to ensure that all fish and wildlife entities work collaboratively on the most important issues.

The Association and the 50 individual State fish and wildlife agencies have a long-standing interest and involvement in the National Wildlife Refuge System, and its contribution to fish, wildlife and habitat conservation. We were instrumental in deliberations leading to the passage of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) and in assisting in the drafting of its implementing policies. Hunting, fishing and other wildlife-dependent recreational uses on National Wildlife Refuges are deeply valued by hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts because of the tremendous opportunities refuges provide, especially in areas where public lands are limited. As you are aware, the sale of duck stamps, purchased by sportsmen and sportswomen, has historically provided the bulk of the funding for acquisition of refuges across the nation.

The National Wildlife Refuge System has a long history of important contributions to the conservation of our nation's fish and wildlife. The Refuge System has grown enormously over the past century and, today, our National Wildlife Refuges support some of the best fish and wildlife habitats in the country, as well as outstanding hunting and fishing opportunities. Refuges are important to local communities for wildlife-dependent recreation. Through the Improvement Act, Congress recognized that these recreational activities promote effective refuge management and help the American public develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife. The As-

sociation and State fish and wildlife agencies are strongly committed to working cooperatively with the Service on managing the Refuge System.

#### **NWR System Operations and Maintenance Backlog**

The Association acknowledges the significant backlog in this area and has consistently supported appropriate increases to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service budget in the Association's Appropriations recommendations provided each year to Congress. The Association was also a founding organization of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) in 1995. This diverse group of fish and wildlife conservation organizations, sportsmen's organizations, and environmental organizations was formed to support and advocate enhanced funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System, reflecting the value of the System to all our citizens. The Association supports the works of CARE to bring attention to the needs of the System, and commends to you the most recent Annual Report, which synthesizes the compelling needs of the NWR System.

With respect to the backlog and ways to remedy it, let me acknowledge what we all know, and that is the stringent fiscal environment in which we find ourselves. The states have been and continue to endure budget reductions, staff furloughs, staff reductions and other measures, so we understand the budget constraints in which we seek to advance conservation. In this context of reduced and scrutinized state and federal budgets, I would suggest that these circumstances compel even greater cooperation between the FWS and the respective state fish and wildlife agency in order to prioritize fish and wildlife conservation needs while continuing priority public uses of the NWRs, the so-called "big 6"—hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and interpretation. Both the FWS and the States have authorities and responsibilities for managing fish and wildlife on the NWRs. The Improvement Act of 1997 gives clear Congressional direction to and encouragement of that cooperation, creates a framework in which it can and should happen, and acknowledges the value of state fish and wildlife strategic plans in informing NWR conservation and public use programs. Further in my statement I summarize for the record those particular aspects of the so-called Refuge Organic Act (the Improvement Act).

Let me reflect here on the work of the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division with the Fish and Wildlife Service on NWR management to illustrate needs and opportunities to be realized by closer cooperation.

In my own State of Georgia, the 9 national wildlife refuges comprising half a million acres are managed with just 44 staff positions. That's a shortfall of 48 permanent and 18 temporary positions as identified in the Refuge System's 2009 national staffing model. The staffing shortage for permanent positions exceeds 50 percent.

It's important to explain the backlog in operations and maintenance in the context of the priority public uses for wildlife-dependent recreation outlined in the Improvement Act. Without adequate in-house labor, small projects like repairing a boardwalk or information kiosks that support environmental education, wildlife photography and birding opportunities simply don't get done in a timely manner. In addition, tough priority-based decisions are being made concerning annual maintenance projects on roads, trails, and other refuge facilities that impact the quality of our visitors' experience as well as their safety. Freshwater impoundments and associated facilities don't get the maintenance they need impacting public hunting opportunities for waterfowl and other priority uses. In Georgia, the current backlog for deferred maintenance on existing facilities is \$56.3 million. Additionally, more than 90 mission-critical habitat projects totaling \$10.1 million remain unfunded in Georgia.

And while Georgia has not been hit with major catastrophes to the same degree our neighboring Southeastern states have had to endure from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, to last year's BP oil spill, to the ongoing floods in the Mississippi Valley, extended droughts and wildfires have afflicted us. You may remember the record setting Big Turnaround Fire at Okefenokee NWR in 2007, and today a wildfire at Okefenokee has burned more than 145,000 acres and is not yet fully contained. Such catastrophic events further inhibit the Service's ability to complete day-to-day maintenance work. Each crisis stretches every available equipment operator, maintenance technician, firefighter, and biologist from our respective agencies.

The Service and my agency in Georgia continue to struggle to do more with less. As we face these collective challenges, we are forging innovative partnerships to accomplish common goals. In the heart of Georgia, we are working together on a greenway-blueway trail plan to conserve land and waters that increase recreational opportunities and eco-tourism in the Ocumulgee River Floodplain near the Piedmont and Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuges. On the coast, we are working together on both the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture and the Atlantic Flyway Council to con-

serve migratory bird populations while enhancing bird watching and hunting opportunities on private lands, State areas, and coastal Refuges. On the southern boundary, surrounding our iconic Okefenokee Swamp, we are cooperating with private landowners to battle the ongoing 147,000-acre wildfire on the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Together, these help us meet “the big 6” priority public uses.

Finally, to contribute to the conservation objectives my state agency has and the science capacity my agency needs to meet those objectives, we have joined forces with the Service and our partners around the conservation table in the fledgling South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative. We believe the LCC’s collaborative, science-based approach to large-scale conservation efforts is the best way to ensure we are spending the right dollar in the right spot. As Congress considers how to address the National Wildlife Refuge System’s critical maintenance backlog, please also consider the resource needs of these important partnerships.

#### **National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997**

The Improvement Act, completed after years of bipartisan discussion and deliberation, truly represents a benchmark in the history of the Refuge System. It established a statutory mission of the Refuge System to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of fish and wildlife and their habitats. With the Improvement Act, Congress reaffirmed that National Wildlife Refuges are for fish and wildlife conservation first, clearly setting them apart from other federal public lands. In addition, Congress directed the Service that compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses are the priority general public uses of the Refuge System and shall receive priority consideration in refuge planning and management. No less important is Congress’ direction to the Service to effectively coordinate management of fish and wildlife within the Refuge System with state wildlife agencies.

The Improvement Act, and its legislative history, is replete with explicit Congressional direction to the Secretary of the Interior (and thus the USFWS) regarding management of the System, its mission, appropriate public use, and coordination with the State fish and wildlife agencies.

The mission of the NWR System is articulated in law as:

“The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans”.

The law goes on to further articulate that it is the policy of the United States that:

- (A) “each refuge shall be managed to fulfill the mission of the System, as well as the specific purposes for which that refuge was established;
- (B) compatible wildlife-dependent recreation is a legitimate and appropriate general public use of the System, directly related to the mission of the System and the purposes of many refuges, and which generally fosters refuge management and through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife.
- (C) compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses are the priority general public uses of the System and shall receive priority consideration in refuge planning and management; and
- (D) when the Secretary determines that a proposed wildlife-dependent recreational use is a compatible use within a refuge, that activity should be facilitated, subject to such restrictions or regulations as may be necessary, reasonable, and appropriate.”

The law defines “wildlife dependent recreation” and “wildlife dependent recreational use” to mean “. . . a use of a refuge involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, or environmental education and interpretation”. These activities have become popularly known in the jargon as “the big 6”. Clearly Congress intended the Secretary to facilitate these “big 6” activities as long as they were compatible. As the Committee Report (House Report 105–106) further amplifies:

“The term ‘facilitated’ was deliberately chosen to represent a strong sense of encouragement, but not a requirement, that ways be sought to permit wildlife-dependent uses to occur if they are compatible. As Secretary Babbitt stated during the negotiations leading to H.R. 1420: ‘The law will be whispering in the manager’s ear that she or he should look for ways to permit the use if the compatibility requirement can be met.’ By the same token, however, the Committee recognizes that there will be occasions



when, based on sound professional judgment, the manager will determine that such uses will be found to be incompatible and cannot be authorized.”

And, with respect to the issue of budget shortfalls and facilitation of the “big 6” uses, the Committee Report contemplated this circumstance and provide this direction:

“New Section 5(3) defines the term ‘sound professional judgment’ as the collection of findings, determinations and decisions that support compatibility determinations. Such determinations are inherently complex and will require the manager to consider principles of sound fish and wildlife management and administration, available science and resources, and compliance with applicable laws. Implicit within this definition is that financial resources, personnel and infrastructure be available to manage permitted activities. The Committee expects the USFWS to be energetic and creative in seeking such resources, including partnerships with the States, local communities and private and nonprofit groups. The Committee also expects the USFWS to make reasonable efforts to ensure that lack of funding is not an obstacle to permitting otherwise compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses.”

The law further directs that the Secretary shall, in administering the System, “. . .ensure effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with. . . the fish and wildlife agency of the State in which the units of the System are located.” And, Congress further directed that the Secretary, in preparing a comprehensive conservation plan for each refuge, do so not only consistent with the Improvement Act, but “. . . to the extent practicable, consistent with fish and wildlife conservation plans of the state in which the refuge is located. . .” Finally, Congress exempted coordination with State Fish and Wildlife Agency personnel pursuant to the Improvement Act from the application of the Federal Advisory Committee Act. We conclude that this is very clear statutory direction that management of the System is done in close cooperation with the state fish and wildlife agencies.

I would direct your attention to USFWS Policy 601 FW 7, entitled “Coordination and Cooperative Work with State Fish and Wildlife Agency Representatives on Management of the National Wildlife Refuge System”. It says, in part:

“Sec. 4 What is the Service’s policy on coordination with the States?”

- a) Effective conservation of fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats depends on the professional relationship between managers at the State and Federal level. The Service acknowledges the unique expertise and role of State fish and wildlife agencies in the management of fish and wildlife.
- b) Both the Service and the State fish and wildlife agencies have authorities and responsibilities for management of fish and wildlife on national wildlife refuges as described in 43 CFR 24. Consistent with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, the Director of the Service will interact, coordinate, cooperate, and collaborate with the State fish and wildlife agencies in a timely and effective manner on the acquisition and management of national wildlife refuges. Under the Administration Act and 43 CFR 24, the Director as the Secretary’s designee will ensure that National Wildlife Refuge System regulations and management plans are, to the extent practicable, consistent with State laws, regulations, and management plans. We charge refuge managers, as the designated representatives of the Director at the local level, with carrying out these directives. We will provide State fish and wildlife agencies timely and meaningful opportunities to participate in the development and implementation of programs conducted under this policy. This opportunity will most commonly occur through State fish and wildlife agency representation on the comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) planning teams; however, we will provide other opportunities for the State fish and wildlife agencies to participate in the development and implementation of program changes that would be made outside of the CCP process. Further, State fish and wildlife agencies will continue to be provided opportunities to discuss and, if necessary, elevate decisions within the hierarchy of the Service”.

### **Conclusion**

Let me conclude by reiterating that with respect to the System maintenance and operations in light of budget shortfalls, cooperation with the State fish and wildlife agencies can result in better ameliorating the results of budget shortfalls, but states need to be engaged early by the Service. Both the FWS and State fish and wildlife agencies have authorities and responsibilities for managing fish and wildlife on

NWRs. A collective discussion between the FWS and the State fish and wildlife agency can reflect on which respective agencies have what capability and resources to continue effective administration of the individual refuge to meet both its mission and its contribution to the conservation objectives of the State fish and wildlife agency. State fish and wildlife agencies likely will want to assist (or continue to assist) in administration of certain programs as hunting and fishing but many will likely need some provision of federal funding or at least a cost-sharing of some type. Otherwise, this could become an unfunded mandate to the states.

We are concerned that the Service's practice (in response to budget shortfalls) of putting Refuges into "preservation" status could mean no public activities, including the "big 6" mandated by Congress, will be allowed. There needs to be clear direction from the USFWS Director that the provision of these 6 activities are priority public uses and all other uses are secondary to them. Let me reiterate again that we have no argument that the conservation mission of the System is pre-eminent and that the FWS, in cooperation with the State fish and wildlife agencies, is obligated to fulfill that mission. But, it is eminently clear that the "big 6" are the priority public uses and Congress has directed the Service to facilitate those uses.

Finally, the Service is currently moving forward with an enormous effort to develop a renewed vision for the National Wildlife Refuge System, with the national conference, *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation*, to be held in Madison, Wisconsin in July 2011. The Association and State fish and wildlife agencies are represented on the vision process steering committee, and will participate in the vision conference, to address the states' priorities for the Refuge System. The Service's *Conserving the Future* Conference provides the perfect forum for facilitating discussions on the issues raised in this testimony, reaffirming the importance of the Improvement Act and its direction to the Service regarding management of the Refuge System, its mission, appropriate public use, and coordination with the State fish and wildlife agencies, and how best to implement the Service's new vision.

Mr. Chairman and honored committee members, thank you for the opportunity to share our perspectives and I would be pleased to address any questions.

Dr. FLEMING. Thank you, Mr. Forster. And that was perfect timing, within three seconds of five minutes. You may get the prize today. Next we have Ms. Recce of the National Rifle Association. You are recognized, Ma'am, for five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF SUSAN RECCE, DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE, AND NATURAL RESOURCES, INSTITUTION FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION, NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION**

Ms. RECCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The National Rifle Association appreciates the invitation that was extended to us to testify. The growing backlog of operation and maintenance needs within the Refuge System has been of great concern to the NRA and its hunter members as far back as 15 years ago.

We helped form a coalition to address this problem that was just mentioned, which is the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement, and the NRA has been an active participant in that CARE group over the past 15 years.

We are also here because hunters have been the backbone of the Refuge System dating back to 1903 when the first refuge was created. More than \$50 million has been generated for the Refuge System, largely by waterfowl hunters through the purchase of the Duck Stamp, which has added more than five million acres of wetland and grassland habitat to the system.

This volunteer citizen based revenue for Federal land acquisition is unparalleled anywhere else, and exemplifies the unique role that hunters play in wildlife conversation. Some might suggest that funding for land acquisition further exacerbates the problem of

financing the management responsibilities that go with acquiring new land.

The NRA views the Duck Stamp revenue and Congressional appropriations for land acquisition as a requirement for good citizen and government investment, and in the present and future protection and restoration of wildlife resources that this country is blessed with.

Mr. Chairman, the NRA appreciates the attention that your Subcommittee is focusing on the backlog, and of particular concern to us is the impact that it could have on hunting, which is a wildlife dependent activity recognized as a priority public use in the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.

Over half of the 533 refuges which we have today are open to hunting. What is unlikely is that the refuge system will become self-sustaining or fully funded with annual appropriations. More can be done with what is already being utilized.

First is strengthening partnerships, especially with the Fish and Wildlife Agencies, which Mr. Forster just spoke about. Second, is the better utilization of volunteers. People who volunteer their time and labor at refuges contribute around 20 percent of the total work accomplished.

That is the equivalent of 643 full-time employees out of a workforce of 3,500. One-fifth of the total projects accomplished by volunteers is an impressive figure, but it is possible to increase that.

Volunteers are supervised by visitor services staff, but often times when the money is tight the position is absorbed or not filled, meaning that all the potential volunteer labor can't be harnessed.

It also takes staff time to train volunteers to teach and supervise others, and so the network of volunteers could be hugely expanded with a small investment in visitor services for staff.

Further, volunteers are a resource that can be shared by several State and Federal land managers in a geographic area. So there would be no loss of opportunity for those who want to volunteer.

This is an area that needs to be examined closely as many of the baby boomer generation have retired, or about to retire, and have the health, education, income, skills, and interest to do something of value.

Another administrative step would be to expand the interagency partnership that was created in Nevada in 1997, where the four Federal land management agencies formed a Southern Nevada Agency Partnership, or SNAP.

They share resources and agency volunteers, and law enforcement duties are cross-delegated, and they work together on long term planning. Another idea that has been discussed is the issuance of a stamp, the cost of which could be a few cents above the cost of the current postage stamp, with the additional funds going to the Refuge System.

The Postal Service recently issued a stamp for international wildlife. Congress could do something similar for our native wildlife and the Refuge System. You had mentioned about fee increases, and I just want to say that I am concerned about any further increases, because I think that there are a lot of the public who believe that their taxpayer dollars already pay for the upkeep of Federal lands, even though we know that is not the case.

And so I am concerned that there may be resistance to that. I also believe that the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the other land managing agencies have had ample time to tap the authorities and resources available to them to raise revenue through that source, and I think that we might want to be needing to look elsewhere.

And in closing the refuge system protects resources that hunters and millions of other Americans cherish, and they have put a lot of their time and money into protecting that investment.

The first and least costly approach to reducing the backlog is for the Administration to find ways in which volunteerism and partnerships with State and Federal Agencies can be improved and expanded upon. This concludes my remarks. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Recce follows:]

**Statement of Susan Recce, Director, Division of Conservation Wildlife and Natural Resources, National Rifle Association**

The National Rifle Association (NRA) appreciates the invitation to testify today. The growing backlog of operation and maintenance needs within the Refuge System is of such concern to the NRA and its hunter members that we helped form a coalition more than 15 years ago to address this problem. We have been an active participant in the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) since that time.

Hunters have been the backbone of the National Wildlife Refuge System dating back to 1903 when hunter-conservationist President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island as the first national wildlife refuge. Today, there are 553 refuges, with over half or 322 opened to hunting.

Over the past 7 decades, more than \$750 million have been generated for the Refuge System, largely by waterfowl hunters through the purchase of the Duck Stamp. This amounts to nearly \$25 million annually. The Duck Stamp was J.N. "Ding" Darling's visionary approach to building a system of federal lands that are set aside primarily for wildlife and the protection of habitat.

Ninety-eight cents out of every Duck Stamp dollar is spent directly on purchasing land for the Refuge System. Thanks to the support of hunters across America, more than 5 million acres of wetland and grassland habitat has been added to the Refuge System. This volunteer, citizen-based revenue for federal land acquisition is unparalleled anywhere else, in the United States or the world, and exemplifies the unique role that hunters play in wildlife conservation.

Some might suggest that funding for land acquisition further exacerbates the problem of financing the management responsibilities that go with acquisition of new lands. The NRA views the Duck Stamp revenue and Congressional appropriations for land acquisition as a requirement for good citizen and government investment in the present and future protection and restoration of natural resources that this country is blessed with.

That is why the NRA supports CARE's mission to increase the level of operations and maintenance funding for the Refuge System through moderate increases in annual appropriations. That mission helps protect our hunters' long-standing investment in the Refuge System.

Well known is the fact that the operations and maintenance backlog for the Refuge System is over \$3.6 billion; a backlog that can affect the ability of the Fish and Wildlife Service to provide quality opportunities for hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-dependent recreation. The figure is staggering, but what federal land system does not have a long list of needs with a sizeable price tag at the end of the column. The National Park Service, as an example, faces in the neighborhood of \$9 billion in backlog needs.

Mr. Chairman, the NRA appreciates the attention your Subcommittee is focusing on the current backlog of the Refuge System and inviting suggestions on how to address this burden that hangs over the Refuge System. There is no question that the size of the backlog means that many critical elements of running the Refuge System, like wildlife and habitat management projects, facility upkeep and equipment maintenance, cannot be accomplished or are severely constrained because of limited funding.

Of particular concern to us is the impact on wildlife-dependent activities such as hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing that were recognized as important responsibilities of the Refuge System when they were made "priority public uses" in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. All those who value this

unique system of lands have a real concern over how to keep annual funding levels at least minimally adequate.

In the letter of invitation, Mr Chairman, you asked several questions of the witnesses. The first question is why the operations and maintenance backlog has increased over seven fold in the last 15 years.

It probably goes without saying that fixed costs are always on the rise and that it will always be a contributing factor as are costs associated with deferring maintenance so that repair costs are greater when the problem has grown larger. But I believe the greatest factor is due to a better accounting of what assets the Refuge System contains and, consequently, the costs associated with maintaining those additional assets.

The partnership that CARE has developed with the Fish and Wildlife Service over the same period of time could have resulted in this increased backlog because of the importance that CARE has placed on a scrupulous accounting of operations and maintenance needs, along with the accounting of every dollar spent on the backlog. Given that the span of time under review parallels that of CARE's existence, an improved tracking system that CARE insisted upon could be the reason why the backlog increased substantially over the last 15 years.

CARE has consistently asked for concrete data from the Service that would allow us to understand the backlog and overall needs of the Refuge System in order to fully function. Our requests for information have become more finely tuned, and as a result the way in which the Service collects data has improved. As the Service becomes more efficient in the way information is collected, the backlog will likely grow, although in some cases it has declined. As noted in CARE's 2011 report to Congress entitled, "Restoring America's Wildlife Refuges" the operations backlog was reduced from \$1 billion to \$677 million due to new staffing models, the updating of project information and the leveraging of partnerships.

There are also specific impacts on operation and maintenance needs that have contributed substantially to the \$3.3 billion backlog. As noted in CARE's 2011 report, the cost of demolition and management for 7 refuges established since FY 2000 on former military sites added \$65.5 million alone to the backlog. The cost of the clean-up was not absorbed by the Department of Defense before the lands were transferred to the Service.

I also believe that the challenges the Service faces and that the Refuge System has to respond to have also increased like fighting the spread of invasive species, improving habitat for the growing list of threatened and endangered species, intensifying land management in the face of the incursion of suburban development deeper into rural areas, and responding to contaminants that reach refuges from outside its borders. The important question is what steps can be taken administratively or legislatively to reverse this backlog, or at least to whittle it down.

While there will likely never be solutions that will result in the Refuge System becoming self sustaining or fully funded with annual appropriations, I do believe more can be done with what is already being utilized. First is strengthening partnerships, especially with the state fish and wildlife agencies. Many state agencies already have agreements with specific refuges to assist in managing visitor programs, like hunting, as well as to share in law enforcement responsibilities and wildlife restoration projects of mutual benefit. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies are in the best position to speak to that specifically.

Second is the better utilization of volunteers. People who volunteer their time and labor at refuges contribute around 20% of the total work accomplished on refuges—the equivalent of 643 full-time employees for a workforce of just 3,500. One-fifth of the total projects on refuges accomplished by volunteers is an impressive figure, but it is possible to increase that percentage with some administrative adjustments.

For example, volunteers are supervised by Visitor Services staff, but often times when the money is tight, the position is absorbed into other duties or not filled, meaning that all that potential in-kind labor and resource cannot be harnessed and utilized. It also takes staff time to train volunteers to teach and supervise other volunteers, so the network of volunteerism could be hugely expanded with a small investment in Visitor Services staff to manage a team of refuge volunteers.

This is an area that needs to be examined closely as many people of the "baby boomer" generation have retired or about to retire and have the health, education, income, skills, and interest to do something of value. In order to tap this potentially huge pool of volunteers, the Fish and Wildlife Service has to have the staff resources to supervise and train volunteers. Further, volunteers are a resource that can be shared by several land managers in the geographic area so there would be no loss of opportunity to volunteer or work to be accomplished. It also may be valuable to have a survey conducted of volunteers and refuge "Friends Groups" to find out what

they believe could be done to increase volunteerism on refuges. I suspect they know more than anyone else what it takes to recruit and retain good volunteers.

Another administrative step would be to expand to other states the interagency partnership that has been developed in Nevada. In 1997, the 4 land management agencies, the National Park Service, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service and the BLM formed SNAP, the Southern Nevada Agency Partnership. They share resources and volunteers; law enforcement duties are cross delegated and they work together on long-term planning. While each agency has its own mandates, they have a common goal of assisting each other.

One idea that has been discussed is the issuance of a stamp, the cost of which could be a few cents above the cost of the current postage stamp with the additional funds going to the Refuge System. The Postal Service recently issued a stamp for international wildlife, the "Save Vanishing Species" stamp at a cost of 55 cents to be sold for the next 2 years. This was the result of bi-partisan Congressional action last year. Congress could do something similar for our native wildlife. A Refuge System stamp, supported by the power of the 14 million members and supporters that make up the CARE organizations, could be very successful.

If it involves going to the public, any revenue raised outside of appropriations would have to be voluntary. Many people believe that their tax dollars pay for or should pay for the upkeep of federal public lands. Resistance to the payment of entrance fees has arisen because of that belief. So, it is unlikely that fee increases will be well-received. And, I believe that the Fish and Wildlife Service, along with the other agencies, have had ample time to tap the authorities and resources available to them to raise revenue through that source.

In summary, the National Wildlife Refuge System protects resources that hunters and anglers and millions of other Americans cherish and they have put a lot of their own time and money into protecting that investment. There will always be some level of backlog that annual appropriations cannot cover. I believe the first and least costly approach to reducing the backlog that can't be done through appropriations is for the Administration to find ways in which volunteerism and partnerships with state and federal agencies can be improved and expanded.

Dr. FLEMING. Next we have William P. Horn of the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, who is now recognized for five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF HON. WILLIAM P. HORN, COUNSEL,  
UNITED STATES SPORTSMEN'S ALLIANCE**

Mr. HORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. My comments are also offered from the perspective of my service as Assistant Secretary of the Interior under President Reagan, and the privilege of having served as Chairman of the Wildlife Refuge Centennial Commission eight years ago.

Now, in relative terms, refuges have been the red-headed step-child of public lands within the Interior Department. While billions of dollars have been lavished on the smaller National Park System—and I should note that the NPS operating budget is well north of \$2 billion a year—the Refuge System operates on less than one-quarter of the Park System's funding.

And the Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, is to be commended for having done a fine job over the years for doing much more with less, compared to its sister bureau. Despite these good efforts, the Service continues to fall behind in its ability to effectively manage the refuge system.

And I think as the Chairman noted in his opening comments, our debt crisis means that it is highly improbable that this trend is going to be reversed by any significant expansion in appropriations.

And I think that these facts mandate a fresh look at how the refuge system should be operated and should be funded. We would

recommend that Congress consider the following options to redress the operations and maintenance issues.

One, for there to be thorough scrutiny of funding priorities, with an emphasis on those actions that do not increase O&M costs, and those that decrease those costs.

Two, that more efficient means of actually managing refuge units be identified; and, third, determine if expanded user activities and associated user fees can enhance management and operations revenues.

Only a comprehensive effort to look at priorities, cost reductions, and revenue enhancements, are going to reverse the present adverse trends. I want to focus on those last two. Now, personnel costs dominated the refuge operations budget. Present numbers indicate that the average Fish and Wildlife employee working for the Refuge System costs over \$90,000 a year.

In contrast, most State Fish and Wildlife Agencies have significant lower personnel costs, and many State Agencies could likely provide comparable staffing for refuge units for 20 to 30 percent less personnel costs.

We strongly recommend that given the situations that we face that the Service and Congress look to contracting with State Fish and Wildlife Agencies to administer appropriate selected refuge units.

Fish and Wildlife might be able to hire via this contracting the same number of professional qualified staff for significantly less money, enabling the Service to stretch its dollars and still put boots on the ground to effectively manage the refuge units.

And I would note that the 1997 Refuge Act specifically includes language authorizing this very approach. Congress recognized that such flexibility could be important and anticipated allowing Fish and Wildlife to make the very such arrangements.

Congress also needs to look at enhancing revenues from refuge users. Authority to allow refuge entrance and user fees was enacted in the mid-1980s during a similar period of Federal budget restraints.

However, the Senate insisted when the bill passed that 80 percent of those fees be dedicated to land acquisition rather than O&M. We think that given the O&M problems that it is time to revisit that split, and that is something within the purview of this Subcommittee and Congress.

In addition, more activities could be subject to reasonable fees. Hunters and anglers already pay a multiplicity of license and stamp fees, as well as excise taxes, all of which make up the backbone of wildlife funding.

Nonetheless, we are prepared to pay additional reasonable fees to help secure the refuge system. However, it is imperative that other users who have traditionally paid nothing for the privilege of using and enjoying refuges step up to the plate to pay their share, and join the anglers and the hunters.

We believe that more revenue from refuge users is one way to provide more secure funding to augment appropriated dollars. This combination of actions can work to put the refuge system on a more sound financial footing, and the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance stands ready to work with the Subcommittee, the Fish and Wildlife

Service, and the broader community at-large to achieve these goals, and to secure the future for our incomparable wildlife refuge system. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Horn follows:]

**Statement of William P. Horn, on Behalf of the  
United States Sportsmen's Alliance**

Mr. Chairman: On behalf of the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance (USSA), I appreciate the opportunity to testify today regarding operations and management funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System. USSA was organized in 1977 for the purposes of protecting the American heritage to hunt, fish, and trap and supporting wildlife conservation and professional wildlife management. It pursues these objectives at the federal, state, and local level on behalf of its over 1.5 million members and affiliates.

USSA has been deeply involved in Refuge management issues since it intervened in litigation in the 70's to defend duck hunting on units of the Refuge system. USSA was a founding member of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) and heavily engaged in the 1997 enactment of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (NWRSLA). My personal involvement and commitment to the Refuge system extends to my service as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks under President Reagan and the privilege of serving as the Chairman of the National Wildlife Refuge Centennial Commission in 2002-2003.

In relative terms, the Refuge System has been the red headed step child of public lands systems within the Department of the Interior. While billions of dollars have been lavished on the smaller National Park system (the National Park Service operating budget is well north of \$2 billion), the Refuge system operating budget is less than one-quarter of Parks funding. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is to be commended for having done a fine job over the years for doing much more with less compared to its sister bureau. Nonetheless, FWS continues to fall behind in its ability to effectively manage the Refuge system and the maintenance backlog continues to grow. This trend puts the Refuges at risk. Federal funding limitations and the nation's debt crisis mean it is highly improbable that this trend can be reversed by expanded appropriations. These facts mandate a fresh look at how the Refuge system should be operated and funded.

USSA recommends that FWS, and the Congress exercising its oversight authority, carefully consider the following options to redress the Refuge operations and maintenance problems: (1) scrutiny of funding priorities including an emphasis on actions that do not increase operations and maintenance costs; (2) more efficient means of actually managing Refuge units by contracting out management, pursuant to applicable federal Refuge management standards, to state fish and wildlife agencies which can provide management services for lower costs compared to federal personnel; (3) determine if expanded user activities and associated reasonable fees can enhance management and operations revenues; and (4) changes in law or regulations as may be necessary to authorize or facilitate these kinds of actions. Only a comprehensive effort to look at priorities, cost reductions, and non-appropriations revenue enhancements will reverse the present adverse trends.

Spending priorities must be thoroughly reviewed. We would suggest that wholesale land acquisition, which can add to long-term operations costs, be a diminished priority. Increasing land acquisition funding (via the Land and Water Conservation Fund) 63 percent to \$140,000,000, as requested by the Obama Administration, while the Refuge operations budget remains flat at \$503 million, makes little sense. Land acquisition via the Duck Stamp funded (i.e., hunter funded) Migratory Bird Fund and via partnership cost-shared programs such as the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund make sense during a period of budget restraint. This ensures that opportunities to add important habitats to the federal conservation estate can be realized. Similarly providing a reasonable level of acquisition funds via LWCF also enables FWS to purchase inholdings or take advantage of other unique acquisition opportunities. A fiscally prudent acquisition program should focus on unique opportunities to acquire high value lands where federal dollars are stretched via partnership arrangements that bring private monies to the table or less costly easements, compared to full fee purchase, are the target. A smarter acquisition program should enable significant funding to be redirected, in whole or in part, to Refuge operations. Such redirection of funding priorities could make a major contribution to enhancing Refuge system management.

In a similar vein, USSA was struck that "stimulus" funding added to the Refuge system's maintenance backlog. Appropriated federal dollars were used to construct



new visitor centers, creating new maintenance obligations, at multiple Refuges and fish hatcheries. The best advice to give a man in a hole is "stop digging." Yet the Administration keeps digging and making the maintenance "hole" deeper by spending limited federal monies on capital projects creating more maintenance needs. Different priorities are needed to reverse the present adverse trends.

Personnel costs dominate the Refuge operations budget. Present estimates are that the average FWS employee working for the Refuge system costs over \$90,000 a year. This amount reflects salary, benefits, and associated costs. If a Refuge unit needs five staff to manage it, the personnel costs come in at \$450,000 per year. In contrast, most state fish and wildlife agencies have lower personnel costs. USSA conducted an unofficial survey and found that wildlife professionals are retained by state agencies for substantially lower costs. Many state agencies could provide the same five staff (with comparable professional wildlife training) for 20 to 30 percent less cost. We strongly recommend that FWS look to contracting state fish and wildlife agencies to administer Refuge units. FWS might be able to "hire"—via contracting—the same number of professionally qualified staff for a lot less money. This would enable FWS to stretch its dollars and still put the boots on the ground to effectively manage the federal units.

I would note that the 1997 Refuge Act includes language expressly authorizing this very approach (see section 5(b)(5) P.L. 105-57; 16 U.S.C. § 668dd(b)(4)). Congress and the Clinton Administration recognized that such flexibility could become important in the future and anticipated allowing FWS to make such arrangements. Any state agency hired to provide such management services would do so consistent with the purposes and mission of the Refuge unit as specified in the 1997 Act. Hence there is no need to worry that a state wildlife agency contractor would administer a unit in derogation of the applicable federal legal standards.

FWS and Congress also need to look at enhancing revenues from Refuge users. Authority to allow Refuge entrance and user fees was enacted in the mid-1980s during a similar period of federal budget restraint. However, the Senate then insisted that most of these dollars (approximately 80%) be directed to land acquisition accounts and only 20 percent to operations. We suggest that this 80/20 split be revisited and the bulk of such revenues be directed to Refuge O & M.

In addition, more activities should be subject to reasonable fees. As you know, the hunting and fishing community pays a multiplicity of license and stamp fees as well as federal excise taxes on equipment. These monies are the backbone of wildlife conservation funding. We are prepared to pay additional reasonable fees for Refuge uses to help secure the system. However, it is imperative that other users—who have traditionally paid nothing for the privilege of using and enjoying Refuges—step up to the plate to pay their share. More revenue from Refuge users is a way to provide more secure funding to augment appropriated dollars.

This combination of actions—different spending priorities that minimize the creation of new maintenance obligations, contracting out to state wildlife agencies to reduce Refuge operations personnel costs, and enhanced user generated revenues—can put the Refuge system on a more sound financial footing. Most of these actions are presently authorized by existing law. However, Congress should take action—in either the authorizing or appropriations arenas—to direct and facilitate this suite of solutions. USSA stands ready to work with the Subcommittee, and FWS, to achieve these goals and secure the future for our incomparable National Wildlife Refuge system.

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Dr. FLEMING. Thank you, Mr. Horn. And I want to compliment all of our witnesses today. I am hearing a lot of very creative and I think applicable offerings, in terms of solutions, helpful ways that we can stretch our dollars better, and I certainly thank you for that.

I also want to point out that we have been joined by other Members today; Mr. Southerland, Mr. Flores, Mr. Duncan, and Mr. Runyan. So thank you for joining us today. At this point, we will begin questions of the witnesses, and to allow all Members to participate and to ensure that we can hear from all witnesses today, Members are limited to five minutes for their questions.

However, if Members have additional questions, we can have more than one round of questioning. I now recognize myself for five minutes. Mr. Horn, the Fish and Wildlife Service received \$280

million in taxpayer funds in 2009 under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

They used \$91 million of that money to build 15 new refuge and hatchery visitor centers. Based on your experience as a former Assistant Secretary of the Interior and Chairman of the Refuge Centennial Commission, was that a good expenditure of taxpayer money?

Mr. HORN. Well, Mr. Chairman, in my humble opinion, let me put it a simple way. When the best advice that you can give a person in a whole is to stop digging, and I believe that when facing a maintenance backlog of the magnitude that flicks the system at present, to go out and begin to take dollars to construct more and more hard facilities that frankly increase your maintenance obligations, it is probably not a good expenditure.

It would strike me that it would have been a better thing, and it still would have gotten the job and work effort out of it were to have spent some of those dollars on dealing with your present backlog problem, rather than creating new maintenance obligations that just simply add to that backlog.

Dr. FLEMING. So you are saying that why buy more yard if you don't have a lawnmower for the one that you have?

Mr. HORN. Yes, just as I said, if you are in a maintenance backlog situation, why would you put in new capital investments that simply increase your maintenance obligations when you can't take care of what you have?

Dr. FLEMING. And I think that is a characteristic of the stimulus bill in many ways. We actually created, and in many different parts, not the least of which is health care, where we actually now have committed ourselves to even bigger obligations and liabilities down the road, and this is one good example of that.

Mr. Kurth, considering this additional deluge of funds from the so-called stimulus, first of all, how much of this money was spent on reducing the operations backlog?

Mr. KURTH. The money was spent on a number of different things. We talked about the new facilities that we constructed. I would point out that a number of those facilities were replacing very expensive rental property not located on refuges, and where visitors did not have access to the refuge staff. That was one of our criteria.

We also replaced two facilities that were in need, and that had been damaged by storms, or had cracking foundations. All of the facilities that were built were replacing existing facilities that were energy insufficient.

We don't look at these facilities as having added to the backlog. They have eliminated backlog in many places by eliminating facilities.

Dr. FLEMING. Well, I am glad that you said that. How much was deferred to the maintenance backlog?

Mr. KURTH. I am going to have to get the exact figure, but a significant percentage of the Recovery Act funding were applied directly to deferred maintenance projects, and another significant chunk of the money went to habitat projects.

So we built some new efficient facilities that replaced existing ones, and I will find the figure for you in a moment, but close to

\$100 million of deferred maintenance, and we also did a wide variety of habitat problems.

I might note, too, that \$34 million went to work on our National Fish Hatchery System. So part of the criteria was also that we were looking for projects that were ready to go to put people to work.

So there were considerations about putting our citizens to work here that factored in where we chose to select these projects so that they could be up and running.

Dr. FLEMING. Thank you. I apologize for interrupting, but I want to get another question in.

Mr. KURTH. Sure.

Dr. FLEMING. In the past five years the size of the Refuge System has grown from about 96 million acres to 148.8 million acres. That is about a 55 percent increase. Because of this the operations and maintenance backlog has increased from \$440 million in 1996 to the current rate of 3.3 billion; and billion with a B.

This is a 650 percent increase. Could you explain to me why this isn't viewed as totally irresponsible management by the Service?

Mr. KURTH. In the \$3.3 billion figure, there are two components. One is the deferred maintenance backlog in our infrastructure, and the second is our operational needs for staff and mission-critical projects.

I think that we have made progress in both arenas. The 1996 figures were exceptionally low, largely because we were new at trying to do systematic condition assessments. We didn't start doing industry standard cost estimating and condition assessments until about a decade ago.

And what we found is that the costs were much higher than we had estimated in the past. For example, on half of our assets that are roads, we used the Federal Highway Administration to do the condition assessments of our roads, and they knew a lot more about it.

We found out that we had a lot more deferred maintenance backlog on our road system. I think that if we would have asked any refuge manager in the field—and I will tell you that our facilities are getting better. They are not getting worse.

There is still a lot of work to do. We still have facilities that are in ill-repair, but we are making progress because of the investments that we have made. We have a long way to go though, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. FLEMING. OK. Well, I hear what you are saying, but the numbers though are telling us something a little different. It seems like we are getting further and further behind rather than catching up. But I thank you for your answers. I now recognize the Ranking Member for any questions that he may have.

Mr. SABLON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon again everyone. I am also interested in—and I think we are all on the same page—that we need to give the Refuge System the attention that they require, but let me start with Mr. Kurth for starters.

Mr. Kurth, can you please give us an update on the Service's operations for a monument management plan for the Mariana Trench in the Mariana National Monument?

Mr. KURTH. We put a notice of intent out to repair that monument plan, and we asked for comment in advance of that, and that comment period closed a couple of weeks ago. We are looking at those public comments now, and over the course of the next year, we look to work cooperatively, and put a draft monument plan out so that the public will once again have the opportunity to comment on that as we strive to put a good plan in place for the stewardship of the monument.

Mr. SABLAN. Thank you. Again, Mr. Kurth, how do natural disasters affect the operations and maintenance backlog? You said that this flooding going on right now will also have additional costs, and does the Service get compensated for damages incurred by natural disasters, such as the Mississippi River flooding?

Mr. KURTH. In the past, and since 2005, our country has experienced devastating hurricanes, and many significant floods. Our refuges, unfortunately, are located off the coast. We have 188 coastal refuges in the system, and many other refuges are on river systems.

So we get hit pretty hard by these events. We estimate that the damages to our facilities from those events was about \$500 million. Now, Congress has been responsive in making supplemental appropriations, but they have not covered the entire damage.

We still have about \$241 million of damage to facilities that hasn't been funded, and we are doing the best that we can to cope with that.

Mr. SABLAN. So are there ways the Service can leverage partnership opportunities as some have been mentioned, and volunteer involvements at refuges to address some of the staffing and operational shortfalls at many of these places?

Mr. KURTH. Yes. I think first and foremost as many people have mentioned, our close partnership with State Fish and Wildlife Agencies is essential for us to deliver conservation to the Refuge System.

And I have worked in nine different States with the Service, and we have always had a co-dependency with our State Fish and Game colleagues, and we will work extremely closely together with them.

Our volunteer workforce is a tremendous asset. 42,000 citizens help us out there, but they do take some management, and some refuges are maxed out. We do things like provide RV pads for people to camp, and once you max those out, you have to build more or you are limited.

Last year, I think you will remember that Congress authorized the Volunteer and Community Support Act, which called for us to have a National Volunteer Strategy completed by the end of this year, and we will be working on that plan throughout the course of this year to try to find additional innovative ways, and we look forward to working with the Committee as we develop and present that plan.

Mr. SABLAN. Well, thank you. Ms. Clark, can you tell us why land acquisition and the operations and maintenance budgets are equally important in helping the refuges that need attention?

Ms. CLARK. Sure. In some instances, it is the flip side of the same coin. Clearly, taking care of what we have is critically impor-

tant, and I don't dispute the challenges associated with the backlogs, some caused by fuzzy math of a decade ago, and so now the reporting and management of the backlog is more transparent and more real.

But at the same time as we deal with the increasing urbanization in this country, it hardly matters what you do for wildlife if you don't take care of their habitat. And the National Wildlife Refuge System has been set aside as the premier land, where wildlife have those anchors for protection, and the need to protect habitat where there are willing sellers, or where there is opportunity to protect these contiguous areas, is extremely important.

I think that a lot of the priority of land acquisition for the Service today is rounding out existing refuge parcels, and dealing with in-holdings, and addressing easements that ultimately can contribute to reducing the management associated with things like fire fighting, or invasive species management.

But the need to address landscape conservation efforts through land acquisition, prioritized in a very transparent fashion is very important.

Mr. SABLAN. I would like to continue this questioning, but I have run out of time. So, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. FLEMING. I thank the Gentleman, the Ranking Member. Now, I recognize Mr. Flores, the Gentleman From Texas.

Mr. FLORES. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate you holding today's important hearing, and I want to thank all of our witnesses for appearing today. It is unfortunate that the operations and management backlog at the National Wildlife Refuge System has exploded from a level of \$440 million in 1996, to over \$3.3 billion and 553 refuges today.

We also recognize that the difficult fiscal situation that our country is in today, and so I am pretty puzzled that our Administration would only try to make the problem more worse by proposing to acquire more land.

I am hoping that we can find solutions to this problem to develop the right balance between operations funding and capital funding to put the management of the National Wildlife Refuge System on a sustainable funding path.

And I appreciate some of the ideas that Mr. Horn put out, but I want to drill into one of these for just a minute based on something that we have actually been doing at Fish and Wildlife.

According to my notes, it appears that since 1970 the Service has completed 40 memorandums of understanding with the States and municipal entities for the operation of Federal fish hatcheries.

And, Mr. Kurth, I was wondering if you could tell me how that has helped to leverage your dollars to go further?

Mr. KURTH. Are you speaking about National Fish Hatcheries?

Mr. FLORES. Yes.

Mr. KURTH. Quite frankly, sir, that is not my area of expertise, and I am not familiar with the details of those things, but it is certainly common throughout the Refuge System for us to have memorandums of understanding with State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, local governments, to find areas where we can cooperate and leverage our resources, and that is a common practice in the refuge system, and one that we actively pursue.

Mr. FLORES. OK. So since I have asked you questions that are somewhat out of your space, how have those MOUs worked for the areas that you do have jurisdiction over?

Mr. KURTH. There is a wide variety of them. We have master memorandum agreements with, I believe, every State in the Union. Often times those things can be used as tools to find project areas where we can give money to a State to do a project if they can do it more effectively, more cost effectively than we can.

We have a couple of agreements with Tribes, where they do certain bodies of work on National Wildlife Refuges, and where we find that to be mutually beneficial. Frequently with cities and counties, we have memorandums of understandings to provide refuge law enforcement, where we are understaffed and can't put the right number of officers.

We work with them to help offset some of their costs to provide assistance, and pretty much our refuge managers are looking for any way they can to get their job done in a cost effective way, and partnerships are an essential part of how we deliver conservation.

Mr. FLORES. So in general would you rate that those efforts as having worked out effectively to help leverage your dollars, your taxpayer dollars to go further?

Mr. KURTH. I think that our partnerships have been extremely successful in leveraging dollars, and we have them with States, local governments, conservation organizations, tribes, and that is an essential part of our business.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you. I yield back my time remaining.

Dr. FLEMING. The Gentleman yields back his time, and next is the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Southerland.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank everyone for testifying today. Mr. Kurth, I wanted to ask if—well, I was going to ask you my question, and I just misplaced it. Hold on here.

Will the Fish and Wildlife Service provide this Subcommittee with a copy of the Service 2010 Economics Report on the Fisheries program?

Mr. KURTH. We would be happy to. Again, because the Fisheries program is different, but with any of our reports, we would be happy to share with the Committee.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. Well, very good. We can delve off because that is one thing that I would like to have, and that I know that this Committee would certainly like to have, and we appreciate your answer there.

One of the things that I would like to delve into, and we have kind of been talking along these lines, is that since it is unlikely that the Service is going to receive any new huge infusion of discretionary funding, what are some creative ideas for dealing with the problems, the backlog problems that we have talked about here today, or do we just ignore those and acquire additional property?

And that does not seem to be a smart way to go, but what is the discussion going on in the Department, or are there discussions going on in the Department for creative ideas?

Mr. KURTH. I think all of us in government are looking for creative ways to stretch our dollars. I mentioned our national volunteer strategy as something that we are looking at right now.

For our maintenance backlog, we are more and more using what we call maintenance action teams, where we will pool our maintenance professionals from a number of refuges and send them as a team on-site to keep costs down.

Sometimes they will stay with campers. We are detailing refuge officers from one refuge to another to stretch out our limited number of officers to help other stations. We have lots of agreements with organizations like Ducks Unlimited, where we cost share habitat restoration. We work with our Friends groups, who often come up with dollars to help us do projects that welcome and orient visitors to refuges.

We are open to anybody's ideas on how to do more. We recognize the tight fiscal times that we are in, and that conservation has to be something that we do together with everybody who shares an interest in our Nation's wildlife heritage.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. I would like to bring your attention to one particular issue. The Palmyra, which is one line of islands in Micronesia. It is about a thousand miles south of Honolulu, and obviously you are familiar with this.

The American people purchased these islands in the last decade, and they have a rat problem. Now, these are islands that no one—I mean, obviously this is clearly a refuge. No one goes there. It is a thousand miles south of Honolulu, and the American people are spending \$2.7 million right now for rat eradication.

I mean, I am looking at a 653-page report right here on how we should go about killing these rats. You know, this is difficult for me, and I am going to just take a real deep breath. It is Friday, and fighting this beast is exhausting.

But I have to tell you why wouldn't we load up a bunch of cats and just take them down there and unleash them? I mean, really, \$2.7 million? I have one minute, but I am eager to hear this explanation.

Mr. KURTH. When we protected Palmyra National Wildlife Refuge, we protected probably the best, most pristine coral reef ecosystem in the world, and that was a significant objective.

The island itself being infested with rats has—rats have a decimating effect on nesting birds. Wildlife refuges require wildlife management, and we can go in one time and eradicate those rats on that island. That is a one-time cost. I understand that it is a lot of money, but we can make that place one of the best places for pelagic seabird nesting in the world.

But wildlife in this day and age takes management, and I understand that this is an expensive project. We just did this two years ago in Alaska on a place called Rat Island in the Aleutians, where we eradicated the largest rat eradication, and already there are thousands and thousands of birds returning to nests on an island where they have been decimated by rats.

So we are in the wildlife management business, and we respect your oversight on how much these things cost, but we can make that place a premier bird nesting area, and that is the business that we are in, sir.

Dr. FLEMING. OK. The Gentleman's time has expired. Next is the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Duncan, for five minutes.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't have a 653-page report to talk about, and I really don't have a question for you guys other than I want to simply thank Mr. Horn for some of the comments that you made in your written statement, because like you, I am just dumbfounded that the Administration has spent good, hard earned American dollars that are paid by the taxpayers on land acquisition when we can't maintain what we have now.

And I am a hunter, and so I have taken advantage of being able to hunt on some of the wildlife refuges where hunting is permissible, and up against a lot of them, whether it is down at Mahannah, or there in Santee in South Carolina.

I also understand quite honestly the contribution that hunters and fishermen make to conservation in this country. As an auctioneer in my previous life, I raised millions of dollars for conservation efforts, whether for Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, or even the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation here on The Hill, that promotes these activities, and the CCA.

I mean, I can go on and on about the hunters and fishermen that are out there investing their dollars into conservation organizations that are doing the right thing, and putting up wood dug boxes, and restoring the national wild turkey, the wild turkey in this nation, which at one time a distinguished gentleman named Franklin wanted to make the National Bird.

So, I am amazed that we can continue throwing money not away, because I don't believe that we are throwing it away to invest in land, but at a time when you can't maintain what you have got, and you continue to dig the hole deeper and deeper, and having to maintain that, you are going backwards.

So we have to stop somewhere, Mr. Chairman. We have to stop purchasing this land and start taking care of what we have got, and so I just wanted to point out that, Mr. Horn, you made some great comments in there.

I am looking for one in particular, and I can't find it. So what I would like to do, Mr. Chairman, as I yield the balance of my time back to the Gentleman from Florida, because I don't think that he was finished with his cat comment. Do you need the time, sir? I will be glad to yield.

Dr. FLEMING. Yes, we are all dying to hear more from Mr. Southerland. So you have the remainder of the time.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. Well, let me say this. That is an over-simplistic idea, but that is how the American people right now—I mean, now we look. I know that it is a lot more complex than that. It has got to be. You generated a 653-page report, and there has got to be some complexity in there.

But I guess I am struggling right now at trying to justify some of the requests that we are getting, and spending some of the money that we are spending when the American people—and I can appreciate your job, and there is a place, and it is needed.

I am an avid outdoorsman. I grew up in the woods, and I believe in proper management, but you are not properly managing. You have more than you can manage, and I think and I believe that you have to prove faithful in the little things before you get more.

And we are being asked to give you more. How is that a responsible ask, and like in the islands that I made reference to as far



as the rats? I mean, how do you justify that with the American people?

Mr. KURTH. I think that we are in the same situation you are with lots of conflicting needs.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. I am sorry?

Mr. KURTH. I said, I think that we are in the same position that you are in. We have lots of conflicting needs, and what we both struggle to do is to identify the most important priorities and strike the right balance.

And I think that that is where we have to go into looking at the land acquisition equation in a little bit more depth. Some of these lands are expensive to operate. Others are next to cost free. And I think what we need to do is to be very thoughtful and discern where we can make the strategic investments in land protection so that wildlife can be conserved in this country, and our citizens can enjoy it.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. Let me ask you one question, because I know that I am running out of time. Do we have too much land that we can manage?

Mr. KURTH. We have management that goes undone, but we still are providing the finest wildlife habitat in the world.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. That is fine, and you are doing that, but do we have too much land to manage?

Mr. KURTH. We do not have too much land to manage, but we have projects that aren't getting done because we don't have the resources to do everything.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. I would say this. That before you buy property and you spend \$9-1/2 million to acquire property, it is not unrealistic that these kinds of problems that are going to cost the American taxpayer a lot more money, those are vetted out, and just maybe there might be some property that we want to pass on.

Mr. KURTH. Sir, I think you are exactly right, and that is where our budget justifications each year for each project request, we do include in our budget justification what the operational costs are, and those are there for everyone to consider when they look at what the appropriate land acquisition funding should be.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. Thank you.

Dr. FLEMING. The gentleman from South Carolina yields his time back. Next is Mr. Runyan, the gentleman from New Jersey.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank all of you for being here and for your testimony. Mr. Kurth, I understand that the Service's own report states that the fisheries mission generates about \$3.6 billion in economic output, and supports about 68,000, and generates nearly \$300 million in Federal, State, and local tax revenues. Is that correct?

Mr. KURTH. I did not hear the first part. Which report are you referring to, sir?

Mr. RUNYAN. The Fish and Wildlife Services own report states that.

Mr. KURTH. On fishing?

Mr. RUNYAN. Yes.

Mr. KURTH. Again, because my responsibilities aren't on the fishery side, I am less familiar with that report, but I am sure that you are quoting it accurately.

Mr. RUNYAN. OK. And being in the Agency, if that is true, and we are talking jobs, and we are talking economic output, and we are talking tax revenue, why in the world would the Administration propose to cut fisheries by \$12 million instead of creating new jobs? It is mind-boggling to me.

Mr. KURTH. Again, we have difficult choices to make in our budget. I think what we are looking for in some of the reductions in the fisheries account, and again I would like to be able to provide you with a supplemental answer for the record, because I am not the fisheries program person.

But some of our fish hatcheries were mitigations for water development projects, and what the Service believes is that we can get the costs from those mitigation operations from the Corps of Engineers or whoever did the water project, and that should not come out of our conservation dollars.

And that if they are mitigation hatcheries, the cost of mitigation shouldn't be falling on the surface's core conservation program. So we are looking to find ways to leverage our fisheries' dollars by sharing the costs with other responsible parties.

Mr. RUNYAN. Again, I know that when Dr. Gould was here several months back, I asked the same question, and something that is proven as hatcheries, and being able to put this money back into the system, is land acquisition that important, especially in a time like now when we have something that is proven that can generate revenue?

Mr. KURTH. Well, our National Wildlife Refuges have been proven to generate revenue, and we generate over \$1.7 billion of economic activity because of the recreational uses of refuges, and it creates many thousands of jobs.

I think that I would like to give you fisheries questions for the record, because I don't want to outrun my level of expertise.

Mr. RUNYAN. I appreciate that, because again, I think that a lot of us agree that we are in over our head, and we really have to look at common sense ways to get out of this, and I think that the fisheries are one of them. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. DUNCAN [presiding]. All right. We are going to enter into a second round of questioning, and I appreciate the panelists being here for a little longer. The Chairman had to step out to another meeting, and so I will reserve myself five minutes.

And the first question that I have is just a simple Yes or No, and I am not advocating being necessarily for increasing this, but if the Congress was to increase the price of a Federal Duck Stamp would you support allocating a \$10 increase to refuge operations and maintenance? And I would just ask each one of you that?

Mr. KURTH. We have requested an increase in the Duck Stamp in our budget, but it was for land acquisition for the Migratory Bird Commission to allocate. So I don't think that I am in a position to take any other position than that.

Mr. DUNCAN. All right. How about the NRA and the Sportsmen's groups?

Ms. RECCE. When the subject of raising the Duck Stamp price has come up, the NRA has taken a neutral position on it, and so we would have to get back. Aside from just raising the stamp, the

price of the stamp, but its use for operation and maintenance, that I would have to get back to you on.

Mr. DUNCAN. Have you all polled your members on that at all about an increase in Duck Stamp fees?

Ms. RECCE. No, not directly polled. No.

Mr. HORN. Mr. Chairman, I would say that I think that the issue of the Duck Stamp level and the earmarking of some of those monies for O&M needs to be looked at in the broader context of what I addressed in my statement, which is under the Emergency Wetlands Act of 1986, when passed over here, the Senate side insisted that there be an 80-20 split on those dollars going to land acquisition.

And I think that the revisiting of that statutory 80-20 split ought to be part of an examination of what to do with the allocation of enhanced Duck Stamp revenues as well. I think to take the Duck Stamp out by itself without looking at that current 80-20 under the entrance and user fees would be a non-starter.

But I think that as a comprehensive relook, it makes damn good sense.

Mr. DUNCAN. Well, from my personal history being a sportsman that purchased Duck Stamps, are generally conservation, and I mentioned that earlier, and they are generally OK with paying a user fee, a slight increase if they know that it is going to help the resource.

And if they know that there are going to be more opportunities, more access to Federal land, more opportunities to spend days in the field, extra days, time, access to land, all of those.

But when it is used to maybe wrongly or in ways that they don't support, then they would not support an increase. So it is an issue that we may or may not get to, but that is something that does interest me.

And just another quick question. There are currently 10 National Fish Hatcheries, and that are classified as Hatchery Management, and State operated facilities. Is there anyone on the panel who believes that these hatcheries are not being effectively managed by the States?

[No response.]

Mr. DUNCAN. So I take that to mean that you all think the States are effectively managing that? So I appreciate that. That is the last question I am going to have, and I will turn next to the gentleman from the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana.

Mr. SABLAN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I ask my next question, Mr. Kurth, I would say that those rats are not indigenous to our islands, and I know that we didn't bring them there and they didn't bring their own canoes, and so can we find out who brought those rats there, and who is responsible and get them off?

[Laughter.]

Mr. SABLAN. Oh, the United States Navy. So the government has to pay to get those rats off those islands, and once you are done, bring them up to the volcanoes that we have there. But thank you.

Again, Mr. Kurth, can you please tell us how—and give me some examples of how acquiring land within the boundary of a refuge can actually be a win-win situation for taxpayers and wildlife, and

by reducing operational costs, and creating better connected wild-life habitat?

Mr. KURTH. Sure. Let me give you an example that I was looking at just the other day in the Colusa Refuge in the Sacramento Valley in California, one of the finest waterfowl areas, and waterfowl hunting areas in the country.

We recently bought an in-holding right in the middle of that National Wildlife Refuge, and what it did is that it got rid of a lot of boundary that we had to fence, and it let us manage the water facilities there.

There they have managed impoundments, and we did not have the ability to step the water down from the northern most units to the southern most one, because we didn't control the land in between, and it greatly complicated our management.

The landowner wanted to sell, and we have a price that was agreeable to him, and we got the tract, and now we have a much more effective way to manage water at a reduced cost and complication for us.

And I think we have these examples over and over again. I think that it is not hard to imagine how having a tract right in the middle of a refuge that is being not managed for invasive species has implications for us.

So we think that there are lots and lots of examples, and we would be happy to submit some more for the record if you would like. When we have bought holdings on refuges, it has been a win-win situation that has reduced our costs.

Mr. SABLAN. I will make this quick because I am running out of time. So if you have property, and you own the land, and you have a refuge with four sides to a boundary, and you have private property there, which also has four sides, and so you are now responsible for not four boundaries, but eight, right?

Mr. KURTH. Correct.

Mr. SABLAN. Because you have to take that private property and add it to the refuge. And I understand that the United States has robust populations of waterfowl, and that are enjoyed by hunters and bird watchers alike. But what role has the refuge system actually played in this environmental success story, and would it have been possible without land acquisition?

Mr. KURTH. The role of acquiring land at National Wildlife Refuges has been pivotal in the recovery of waterfowl populations since the Dust Bowl days of the Depression. We have, I think, an outstanding program that was used and was implemented to meet population goals, and to distribute refuges along the various flyways, and we have been at it hard since the 1930s.

We have a tremendous North America waterfowl management plan that gives us clear objectives, and because of this network of wildlife refuges, we have done a great job working in partnerships with others, like our State colleagues, and Ducks Unlimited, and our Canadian and Mexican colleagues, of having stable waterfowl populations at a level much higher than they were when I started my career.

Mr. SABLAN. And, Ms. Clark, do you believe that Mr. Kurth or the Service has generally struck the right type of balance with all of its obligations relating to the O&M needs of the Refuge System?

Ms. CLARK. I do. They have a dual challenge, and certainly are taking care of what they have, and assigning priorities to kind of transparent management of the system is important, but not bypassing opportunities like the one in the Sacramento or the California River Valley, is incredibly important to round out these refuges.

So clearly we can always do better, and the Service can always do better, but as I mentioned before, I believe that these two competing issues are flip-sides of the same coin when it comes to conservation.

Mr. SABLON. I am running out of time, but can you please give the Committee what your recommendations are in writing for addressing the O&M backlog? And I am going to go back to Mr. Kurth. Well, I don't have enough time, and so thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DUNCAN. I want to thank the Ranking Member for that, and we will next go to the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Flores, for five minutes.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Kurth, when you look at acquiring new acreage today, let us assume for the purposes of my question that the cost is \$100 an acre. What is the cost for the—and I realize that there is no typical property, but on average based on your experience and what the agency has today, what is the cost for the next 10 years to properly maintain that property?

Mr. KURTH. That really has more variables to it and I can't give you a scientifically credible answer to that. I mean, when we added the marine monuments, we added 50 million acres, and there is work to be done out there, but we have not really added any significant dollars to do that work.

And you can see where huge areas like that would be much less expensive. They are not actively managed in the same way that others would. It depends on the condition of the habitat.

If it is infested with invasive species, or rats, like my friend there, then those costs are higher.

Mr. FLORES. What is your best non-scientific answer? I mean, I am assuming—and I think you pointed out earlier in your testimony, that when you do an acquisition, you do come up with an analysis of what the expected maintenance is in the future, and also if there is deferred maintenance at the point of acquisition, and what that is going to cost. So you have to have some feel for this.

Mr. KURTH. Well, every single thing that we do throughout the Refuge System, we spend less than four bucks an acre on an annual basis.

Mr. FLORES. On maintenance?

Mr. KURTH. On everything, in all of our operations, and in all of our law enforcement, and in all of our planning, and in all of our facilities that we maintain maintenance, we manage every acre in the Refuge System for less than four bucks an acre.

Mr. FLORES. Today?

Mr. KURTH. Today.

Mr. FLORES. OK. But we are \$3.3 billion behind, and so what would it take per acre to get up to where—well, let us say that we spent the \$3.3 billion first today, and everything was in an excel-

lent position that the \$3.3 billion would get you to position, what would it be going for? What would the burn rate be going forward?

I am trying to put it in the terms that I would do if I were getting ready to build a chain of hotels. I would want to know what my ongoing maintenance is, and to keep them fresh, and to keep them properly equipped, and to keep them maintained? What could I expect?

Mr. KURTH. You know, I don't think I can give you that figure off of the top of my head. I am also sitting here recognizing that the President asked for the money that he thinks he needs, and I am not in a position to ask for more money than that.

But if we had all of the facilities in a perfectly maintained level, and no maintenance was past due or deferred, it would require more money than we have now to maintain that.

Mr. FLORES. So more than the \$4 an acre that it takes today?

Mr. KURTH. More than our maintenance budget, which is around \$140 million a year. That level of maintenance funding is not adequate to maintain the \$24 billion of infrastructure that we currently have.

Generally, the industry standards are about one to three percent of the capital value of your assets to be put into maintenance, and depending on the type of assets that you have. Obviously, some things like complex buildings are more expensive than fence lines and levees.

Mr. FLORES. Well, I think that it is something that the taxpayers want to know before we commit new capital, new precious taxpayer capital for new projects, and I think it is important to know what is the ongoing annuity that we are requesting from the taxpayers to keep those properties maintained in a good manner.

Mr. KURTH. That is a fair question, sir, and I would be happy to give you an answer for the record, and where I cannot be flip-pant with figures. We have professionals that can give you more detailed scenarios on what that is.

Mr. FLORES. I appreciate that. I would yield to anybody else that wants to expand on that line of questioning. I yield back to the Chairman.

Mr. DUNCAN. Thank you. The Chair will next recognize the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Southerland, for five minutes.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Forster, first of all, thank you for coming from Georgia. In working with the States, is there opportunities that we should be really seeking to allow the States to have more—I know that you have your State properties, and your State obligations.

Well, over there, they are under water. I mean, we are worrying about rats in the South Pacific. So I am wondering, and what I am trying to figure out is, is there a way—and I am trying to be serious here, but is there a way that the States—and obviously if your citizens have the most to benefit from a well managed program on Federal refuges, is there any synergies there that aren't being taken advantage of that maybe I am not familiar with, or that could be taken advantage of because it is your neck of the woods?

Mr. FORSTER. A great question, and I would say from the State's perspective, we are feeling the pain as well. Just in Georgia, we have experienced about a 42 percent overall budget cut in the last

four years, and what we are trying to do as much as anything is manage expectations.

We cannot continue to do the same things that we have always done in light of that. So it has forced us really to rethink all the partnerships that we are involved in, and it is not a discreet process. It is more of a dynamic process that we engage in continuously.

We currently have such a planned meeting with my partner, Nick Wiley, in Florida, who by the way was raised well in Georgia, and then migrated to Florida later, and for the Service to look at this, I don't think it is a one size fits all that we can just shift this entire responsibility to the States, but there are opportunities.

And some of those are small, but cumulatively, I think that if we quantified them, we would find that they are significant, substantial, and that they are I think broadly applied in all kinds of creative mechanisms across the United States.

And we have some of the most creative folks in our field. They can stretch a penny and make copper wire. So we are forced to do more of that, but it really comes down to priorities leveraging, and yes, they are some new opportunities.

But I think more than anything, we are going to have to manage the expectations about what is reality. We are not going to be able to keep up with the backlog, and so we are going to have to make some tough decisions.

But with respect to acquisitions, too, even in our State, a completely hands-off acquisition approach is problematic for a number of reasons. We have already talked about efficiencies gained by in-holdings. There are some real jewels out there that are too important for your State objectives to not think long term.

We acquired a 10,000-acre piece of property in our State, which is not a very pro acquisition State, at least in the recent months, but we required about \$28 million of State funds in light of the budget problem that we are facing, and because it is an opportunity, it is looked at through the lens of priorities, and it mounts up.

I think that we have a much lesser focus. We are not going to be increasing broad scale acquisition projects, but certainly under some scrutiny, it still makes sense to purchase some lands in that kind of environment.

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. Well, obviously as someone who does appreciate the outdoors, it seems to me that there should be some—and you are already working on these. I mean, the partnerships between the NRA and your members, and members of Ducks Unlimited that I am also a member of. I mean, clearly, we do want an environment that we can enjoy.

I think that the taxpayers and those that pay the fees, and pay the stamp prices, I think that there are people that would even pay more if they thought they could have more access. I think that one of the things that the American people find very, very disturbing is that you are going to get my money, and you are going to buy property that we can't manage, and you are going to continue to ask for increased budgets, and I can't take my children hunting or fishing on those properties.

And so I find that that right there is where the American people feel that they are getting the shaft. So there are obviously some things that I think could be done with these organizations, because you represent the people that know how to treat the land right, and they know how to manage game right.

But I know that is a different challenge. I really would like to see the States have more say, because it is your baby, and have more—well, at least in a working relationship, because you all are overwhelmed, and United States Wildlife is overwhelmed. So, thank you. I yield back.

Mr. DUNCAN. Any other Members have questions for the witnesses?

[No response.]

Mr. DUNCAN. If not, I would like to thank all of our witnesses for their valuable testimony and contributions here today. I must say that the rat study has me intrigued. Members of the Subcommittee may have additional questions for the witnesses, and we would ask you to respond to these in writing as they are submitted.

The hearing record will be open for 10 days to receive these responses. I believe this hearing is the beginning of the process, and it is my hope that the CARE Group will use the next six months to nine months to develop a new vision for significantly reducing the operations and maintenance backlog within the Refuge System.

I would also like to thank the Fish and Wildlife Service for all your assistance, and in providing essential background data for this hearing. Finally, I want to thank the Members, the Ranking Member, and the staff, for their contributions to this hearing. If there is no further business, without objection—

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. Mr. Chairman?

Mr. DUNCAN. Yes, sir?

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. If anyone wanted to borrow this 653-page document, that you would be sure to give this back to me on Monday morning, I will let you use it for the weekend.

Mr. DUNCAN. If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:11 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

