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by the construction and manufacturing industries and provide economic security for many of our citizens.

All Americans have an obligation to protect the Earth and a responsibility to be good stewards of our land, and my Administration has made forest health a high priority. Under the Healthy Forest Initiative, we are helping to protect the American people, their communities, and the environment from potentially devastating wildfires. Together we can conserve our woodlands and help leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

Recognizing the importance of our forests in ensuring our Nation's well-being, the Congress, by Public Law 86–753 (36 U.S.C. 123), as amended, has designated the week beginning on the third Sunday in October of each year as "National Forest Products Week" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this week.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim October 21 through October 27, 2007, as National Forest Products Week. I call upon all Americans to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this nineteenth day of October, in the year of our Lord two thousand seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:50 a.m., October 23, 2007]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 20, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on October 24.

Remarks at the Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel, Maryland

October 20, 2007

The President. Listen, thank you all for coming. I appreciate the hospitality you've shown us here at Patuxent Research Refuge. I want to thank all the good folks who work here from the Fish and Wildlife Service as well as the U.S. Geological Survey.

One of the things we've discussed here is a significant environmental challenge we face here in America, and that is, birds are losing the stopover habitats they need and depend on for their annual migrations. And therefore, I've come to discuss a strategy to enhance those habitats, without which many birds could become severely challenged.

To me, this is a national issue that requires national focus. And so I appreciate very much you all giving me a chance to describe our strategy and thanks for your—thanks for working for the country.

I am proud to be here with Laura, birdwatcher extraordinaire. I appreciate Secretary Dirk Kempthorne running our Interior Department. I do thank Wendy Paulson, who's joined us. She's on the board of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Some of the recommendations—or all the recommendations that I'm describing today were brought to our attention by Wendy and a friend of mine from Texas named Rusty Rose, both of whom serve on this important university lab—the board of the lab. I appreciate Judd Howell, the Director, who gave us a tour. And Brad, thank you very much for joining us.

I also want to thank George Fenwick—he's the president of the American Bird Conservancy—for joining us as well. Appreciate the staff members here who worked on this initiative. Thanks for your hard work and your—and bringing what I believe the American people will find is a commonsense policy that makes sense for our future.

I don't know if you know this or not, but each year, more than 800 species of migratory birds brave stiff winds, harsh weather, and numerous predators to fly thousands of miles. Their final destination is the warm climate of the American South or the Caribbean or Mexico, where they stay for the winter. These amazing travelers will then return to their breeding grounds in the north. And as they span these distances, they fascinate and bring joy to millions of our citizens. A lot of folks across the country love to watch birds.

For these migratory birds, surviving their long journey depends on a stopover habitat. That basically means they got to find a place

to rest, a safe place to prepare to continue their journey. Unfortunately, expanding civilization has made it harder for these birds to find places to stop and to rest.

And so that's the challenge we face. And, you know, one area that—one reason we came here is because the national wildlife refuges like this one provide stopover habitat, and they play a really important role in our conservation efforts. My administration has supported the National Wildlife Refuge System. We've expanded some of the existing sites; we created 10 new ones; and we restored and improved hundreds of thousands of acres of habitat for migratory birds. In other words, we recognize the refuge system is an important part of preserving our bird populations.

And we've set a goal that by the time I leave office, we will improve another 200,000 acres. And I appreciate, Mr. Secretary, you joining us and committing your Department to achieving that goal.

In addition to the wildlife refuges, we're also working to improve habitat for migratory birds in our national parks. We've increased funding. But we've got a new initiative that I want to—want the American people to be aware of, and it's called the National Parks Centennial Initiative. And the idea is to match taxpayers' money with private donations to the tune of $3 billion, so that we can improve our national parks. And some of that money is going to go to restoration, to the restoration of a variety of wildlife habitats, including some that directly benefit birds.

Improving our Nation's long-term protections for migratory birds requires conservation beyond the boundaries of our national parks and refuges. And so one of the things this administration has done is to bring together citizens and private groups and officials from every level of government in the spirit of cooperation. In other words, we recognize that the Federal Government alone cannot provide the habitat necessary for migratory birds. We call this program "cooperative conservation," and part of the emphasis is to restore critical habitat.

One of the most important cooperative conservation efforts has been what they call joint venture programs for water fowl. This program has brought together Federal, State, and tribal agencies with private groups and corporations to improve habitat on private lands. It's worked so well for water fowl that we're now using it for other migratory birds. We've had—we have 18 joint ventures now underway, and next year, we're going to add 3 more to help conserve birds along the Rio Grande corridor, the Appalachian Mountains, and on the northern Great Plains.

Here's the way they work. Each venture—joint venture brings together a team of biologists and land managers—these are the experts—and they make—and then they work with the bird conservationists in a particular region to design and carry out critical habitat improvement. To enhance habitat conservation, we're going to put forth next week an innovative policy called recovery credit trading. This policy will provide incentives for landowners to improve habitat for migratory birds and other species. Landowners can earn recovery credits for the habitat they improve, and then they can sell those credits. The idea is to provide incentive for our private landowners to help deal with the concern that I started the speech with, and that is to make sure there's critical habitat available for migratory birds.

There's something else we can do. I asked Congress to provide tax incentives to reward landowners who donate conservation easements. Conservation easements are a good way to ensure the long-term preservation of habitat. They allow people to give up the right to develop parts of their land and then count the value of that right as a charitable contribution. The proposal would allow good citizens who give these conservation easements—allow them to deduct a higher portion of the donation from their income taxes, both in the year they donated and the years that follow. In other words, this is additional incentives for landowners to become a part of this comprehensive national strategy, and Congress needs to pass this piece of tax legislation.

You know, another important measure we've taken is in the conservation title of the farm bill. This title encourages farmers and ranchers to set aside critical habitat through

a program called Conservation Reserve Program, or the CRP. And our proposal to Congress as they rewrite the farm bill, we're asking them to dedicate $50 billion over 5 years to make sure that this program continues in effect. The program has been effective for our farmers and ranchers and, equally importantly, for our bird populations. And my hope is that Congress recognizes its effectiveness and will continue to fund this program.

We're making progress in rural areas, but there needs to be some work in urban areas. And so we've got an interesting program underway to help five cities turn parks and local backyards into stopover bird habitats over the next 2 years. In other words, what we're trying to do is to make sure that we have a successful strategy in five cities that could become the blueprint for cities all around the country.

Many species of birds live part of their lives here in the United States and part in Mexico. So we have a strategy to work with Mexico to enhance bird habitats in their country. I've talked about this issue with President Calderon. He shares my concern about making sure there's critical habitat available for our migratory birds. The Secretaries of State, Interior, and Commerce are working with their counterparts in the Mexican Government. Nongovernmental partners are working to undertake important habitat projects in Mexico as well.

One of the things we have done is we've identified five priority habitats in Mexico. We listened to the experts who pointed us to five important areas, and we have provided $4 million to support conservation initiatives there. I also directed Federal Agencies to increase our Nation's participation in an international effort to protect coastal and marine migratory birds such as albatrosses and petrels. Restoring habitats at home and abroad is going to help us achieve the objectives and goals I have set out, which is providing critical habitat for migratory birds.

Our efforts to restore habitats are strengthening bird populations. Since 2004, the Department of Interior has improved the status of five migratory bird species, and the Department is helping ensure that more than 62 percent of our Nation's migratory bird species are healthy and at sustainable levels. But that's not good enough—62 percent is good, but we can do better. And so I've asked the Secretary to—Secretary Kempthorne to focus on the status of five more species over the next 5 years. And to achieve this goal, we need good data. I mean, we just don't want to be guessing about bird populations; we want to measure. And so I've asked the Secretary to produce a State of the Birds report by 2009. This report will chart our progress. It'll identify species that need additional protections and help us bring more of America's bird species into a healthy and sustainable status.

And, Mr. Secretary, I appreciate your commitment.

Secretary Dirk Kempthorne. Absolutely.

The President. I appreciate the fact that you understand America's greatness is not measured by material wealth alone; it's measured by how we manage and care for all that we have been given. We're people united by our belief that we must be good stewards of our environment. The cooperative conservation policies that we have put in place show our commitment to protecting America's migratory birds, conserving the habitat they depend on, and ensuring that generations of Americans will enjoy the beauty of birds for decades to come.

I appreciate you all joining me. I want to thank you for your interest. God bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:01 a.m. in the Endangered Crane Complex. In his remarks, he referred to Wendy Paulson and Rusty Rose, administrative board members, Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Judd Howell, Director, U.S.G.S. Patuxent Wildlife Research Center; Brad Burns, president, Stripers Forever; and President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico.

Remarks on Signing the Executive Order on Protection of Striped Bass and Red Drum Fish Populations in St. Michaels, Maryland

October 20, 2007

Thank you all. Stuart, thanks for the introduction. Thanks for the invitation here to the Maritime Museum. It's a beautiful site you got here. I can see why people want to live