

**Written Statement of Holly A. Bamford, Ph.D.
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**Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands**

FORUM ON THE RESTORATION ECONOMY AND CONSERVATION

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Introduction to NFWF

Thank you Chair Haaland and Members of the committee for inviting me to participate in this important discussion about the restoration economy and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's role in supporting conservation and restoration in our country. My name is Holly Bamford and I am the Chief Conservation Officer of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation - also known as "NFWF" - is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that was created in a bipartisan manner by Congress and signed into law by President Reagan in 1984. Since then, NFWF has grown to become the nation's largest private conservation grant-maker, collectively supporting more than 18,600 projects and over 5,000 organizations in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. Territories. These projects have generated a total conservation impact of \$6.1 billion and created approximately 120,000 jobs.

We know no one organization can achieve this level of results alone. NFWF strategically creates public-private partnerships to award grants to some of the nation's largest environmental organizations, as well as some of the smallest, to maximize our return on investment. We currently work with 15 federal partners and over 45 corporate and foundation partners to deliver voluntary conservation practices to communities and habitats.

Every day we fulfill our Congressional mandate to build public-private partnerships and steward federal resources responsibly to address stressors on natural resources such as development, wildfire, drought, climate, community resilience and others. We are required by law to notify Congress of any grant of

federal funds over \$10,000 and every grant we make is available to the public on our website. We take our responsibility of stewarding federal funding seriously and therefore operate as a fully transparent and nonpartisan organization. We don't engage in or fund advocacy or litigation instead investing the funds directly into projects that help wildlife, communities and people across this country. The result is 96 cents of every dollar we receive is spent to support conservation programs.

Conservation Business Plans and Outcomes

NFWF's programs are guided by conservation business plans that detail the goals and strategies for conservation action. NFWF's staff and partners use these plans to make the most informed and important conservation investments, by intensively focusing on measuring results and adapting our conservation strategy accordingly.

NFWF also evaluates our investments through rigorous internal and external assessments and evaluations. A team of scientists and conservation experts review grant proposals and weigh assessments against goals identified through the business plans.

NFWF's Conservation Programs and Jobs

NFWF focuses its conservation business plans and programs on landscapes and wildlife, as well as community stewardship and resilience. We engage communities, citizens and conservation experts to voluntarily implement restoration programs that have a positive impact on wildlife, improve water quality and quantity, and benefit local economies to improve the standard of living.

For example, in 2019, NFWF conservation investments helped support over 6,500 jobs nationally, in both urban and rural communities. These projects tend to create localized employment and economic benefits, while supporting relatively well-paying jobs compared to the national average salary. More importantly, NFWF projects support a broad range of jobs across various industry sectors such as agriculture and forestry to engineering and other technical services; as well as employ a diversity of positions, from student interns to organizational directors.

In a time when our country desperately needs to stimulate jobs the restoration economy provides an excellent path to do so – NFWF alone at any given time, has high quality project proposals from our program solicitations that could be funded almost immediately.

NFWF programs also benefit underserved communities. For instance, NFWF, in partnership with the US Environmental Protection Agency, FedEx, Southern Company, Shell, the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service implements the Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program that focuses on using diverse communities and citizen groups to promote the stewardship and restoration of coastal, wetland and riparian ecosystems across the country. Since 1999, the Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Program has supported nearly 1,000 projects through more than \$12.8 million in federal funding and \$11.3 million in private and corporate funding. These grants have leveraged an additional \$78.8 million in matching contributions.

Direct engagement is essential to develop appreciation for conservation efforts and commitment to sustaining those efforts over the long term. Young people are the most vital resource to safeguard the gains that have been made over the past 34 years of NFWF investments in conservation. NFWF's efforts to foster a stewardship ethic within the next generation and create employment opportunities are vital to the continued long-term success of our national, regional and local conservation investments. For example, the Developing the Next Generation of Conservationists program supported young adults aged 16-25 in paid conservation corps and conservation-focused internships to connect young adults to the outdoors through conservation employment programs. From 2012 to 2018, these 320 projects employed 6,534 youth and young adults and 28 veterans in paid conservation corps experiences in 37 states, the US Virgin Islands and District of Columbia.

Since the early 2000's NFWF has partnered with the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP) at the University of Alaska (UA), the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Rasmussen Foundation to increase conservation, outreach and education opportunities for over two dozen Alaska Natives and enhance placement in professional internships and graduation with University of Alaska degrees appropriate for professional employment opportunities.

NFWF Conservation Project Examples

Now that I have given you a view of how NFWF works, I would like to quickly give a few examples of NFWF investments and the positive outcomes they achieved.

- **Building Coastal Resilience:** NFWF partners with NOAA to implement the National Coastal Resilience Fund, a program created to help local governments, conservation nonprofits and natural resource managers strengthen coastal resilience and focus conservation dollars where they will do the most good for both people and wildlife. In 2019, NFWF was able to secure additional private-sector funding from Shell and the re-insurance company TransRe. To date, the Fund has awarded resilience efforts in 23 states and U.S. territories to enhance, build, or restore more than 11,900 acres of coastal habitat that will provide protection to more than 98,000 properties and 2,400 critical facilities or pieces of infrastructure.

An example is the restoration of approximately 80 acres of coastal marsh complex within Swan Lake in Galveston County, Texas. By utilizing dredged materials to increase intertidal elevations to support marsh habitats and reduce the risk of coastal flooding, the project will protect critical port infrastructure, important aquatic nursery and wildlife habitat, and protect adjacent coastal prairies. We chose to highlight this project as it will be protecting port infrastructure, which is a significant economic driver beyond the coastal landscape.

Prior to this, NFWF was already striving to build resilience. Using emergency supplemental funding after Superstorm Sandy ravaged the east coast, NFWF restored and created more than 500 acres of brackish marsh in Delaware where only open water existed before. This single project created wildlife habitat while also protecting coastal communities, evacuation routes and critical community infrastructure. Also following Sandy, NFWF removed 23 deteriorated and outdated dams and culverts which reduced community flooding and hazards from structural failure while also opening up 370 miles of stream miles to fish and aquatic species.

Since Superstorm Sandy, NFWF has been the recipient of additional emergency supplemental funding. In June of 2019, Congress responded to the catastrophic natural disasters of 2018 with passage of a supplemental appropriations bill

that provided NFWF with \$50 million to address emergency coastal resilience recovery. The NFWF Fund was established to increase the resilience of coastal communities located within federally declared disaster areas impacted by hurricanes Florence and Michael, Typhoon Yutu and wildfires in 2018. One example of a project supported by the Fund is the Santa Monica Mountains Woolsey Fire Recovery and Adaptation Program. This Program will create a comprehensive fire prevention program for the region, focusing on homeowner outreach and education, in addition to conserving and restoring plant and wildlife habitat functions by improving homeowner practices and reestablishing native oaks in critical locations. This effort will leverage prior and ongoing planning efforts to achieve more sustainable and resilient approaches to wildfire management in the Santa Monica Mountains region.

- **Green Stormwater Infrastructure Solutions:** The Southeast Michigan Resilience Fund is a partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arcelor Mittal, Kresge Foundation, Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, and the Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation. This program supports projects in the seven-county region of Southeast Michigan, including St. Clair, Macomb, Oakland, Wayne, Washtenaw, Livingston, and Monroe counties. By investing in green stormwater infrastructure solutions, the Fund seeks to improve water quality and reduce flooding and other threats associated with major storm events, while also creating safe, dynamic, and enjoyable public green spaces that improve habitat values for wildlife and quality of life for residents. In its first two years, the Fund awarded 14 grants totaling \$2.9 million. Together, these projects are adding 3.75 million gallons of stormwater storage, restoring and enhancing 833 acres of wildlife habitat and improved and created 16 acres of neighborhood green space. One specific example of how we are benefiting local/underserved communities in Southeast Michigan is through a \$300,000 grant we awarded to Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision. By supporting installation of green roofs and rain gardens, tree planting, and removal of impervious surfaces, this project is adding 260,000 gallons of local storm water storage capacity – reducing the risk of urban flooding, enhancing public green space, and increasing community resilience to storm events.
- **Promoting safe transportation and wildlife migrations:** Partnering with the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource

Conservation Service, and Conoco Phillips, NFWF has worked on wildlife corridors in the West for large migratory game species such as mule deer, pronghorn and Rocky Mountain elk. In FY 2020, the program awarded \$3.1 million in grants, leveraging \$20.3 million in match from grantees to generate a total conservation impact of \$23.4 million. These projects will restore or enhance priority winter ranges, stopover areas and migration corridors. NFWF will work with private landowners and state highway departments to improve fencing, and to protect bottlenecks and other key migration areas threatened by habitat fragmentation and development.

- **Enhancing Diverse Partnerships:** The Five Star Urban Waters and Restoration that I mentioned previously, continues to establish and enhance diverse community partnerships with an education/outreach component to help shape and sustain behavior to achieve conservation goals. Since 1999, these projects are expected to engage more than 845,000 community members across the country in conservation efforts and restore approximately 70,000 acres of land and wetlands.
- **Wildfires and Habitat:** NFWF is partnering with the U.S. Forest Service, CALFIRE, Sierra Pacific Industries and the 11 other largest industrial timber companies in California for the first time to align fuels management projects across jurisdictional lines to protect habitats important for at risk species as well as communities. We are also working closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to inform them of the fuels management work and monitoring of sensitive species.

Closing

In closing, NFWF is one of the largest but also most nimble and effective funders in the nation's conservation community, responding quickly and at an unmatched scale to emerging challenges and opportunities. NFWF continually works with public and private partners to establish new focal landscapes across the country and respond to the needs of citizens and communities. At the same time, NFWF projects play a key role in generating jobs and improving the economy through our conservation and restoration outcomes.