

**STATEMENT OF MARGARET EVERSON,
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE,
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
ON THE FY 2020 PRESIDENT’S BUDGET REQUEST
MAY 21, 2019**

Good afternoon Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member McClintock, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (Service) Fiscal Year 2020 budget request, and for the Subcommittee’s continued support of the Service’s work.

The Service’s mission is “Working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance, fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.” The Service’s work helps ensure a healthy environment, and provides affordable, accessible, and premier opportunities for Americans to enjoy outdoor recreation and our shared natural heritage. The budget underscores the importance of expanding opportunities for all Americans to access public lands and experience the great outdoors.

The budget requests \$1.3 billion in current appropriations for the Service. This is \$101.4 million higher than the FY 2019 budget request for the Service. The budget focuses funding on the agency’s highest priority conservation programs, while containing costs through management efficiencies and other savings to address government fiscal realities. In addition to the discretionary request, the Service also has \$1.5 billion in permanent funding that is primarily apportioned to the States and Territories to support State wildlife and sport fish conservation, recreational boating, and other related programs.

The Administration’s FY 2020 budget request to Congress makes investments to increase access to outdoor recreational opportunities, improve permitting processes, modernize infrastructure, and recover imperiled species. The budget provides funding to achieve the Service’s top priorities for fish and wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation. These priorities ensure access to National Wildlife Refuges for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation; prevent the extinction and promote the recovery of imperiled species and their habitats; address invasive species; support the environmental review of infrastructure and other development projects; and focus on deferred maintenance funding for wildlife refuges and fish hatcheries. Other Administration priorities for the Service include supporting our law enforcement officers and enhancing visitor and employee safety.

National Wildlife Refuge System

The Service administers the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), sustaining the American tradition started by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 to protect fish and wildlife and their habitats and to provide Americans with recreational opportunities for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation. There is a refuge in every State and territory of the United States. The 567 refuges in the Refuge System provide lands and waters for thousands of species of wildlife and plants, sanctuary for hundreds of threatened and endangered species, and spawning

areas for economically and recreationally important native fish. The Refuge System plays an essential role in providing outdoor recreation opportunities to the American public and the associated economic benefits to local communities. Of the 567 wildlife refuges and 38 Wetland Management Districts, 377 are open to some type of hunting, and 312 are open to fishing. Over 2.4 million hunters and over 7.3 million recreational anglers visited these refuges last year.

In total in FY 2018, over 55 million visitors hunted, fished, and recreated on refuges. These visitors help refuges serve as economic engines for local communities, annually supporting 37,000 jobs and \$2.4 billion in visitor expenditures according to the Service's latest *Banking on Nature* report.

The budget requests \$509.5 million to administer the Refuge System. This is the largest budget request ever for the Refuge System and will enable us to significantly enhance outdoor recreational opportunities in rural, urban, and suburban landscapes, as well as to support the vital role of volunteers on our refuges. The budget includes \$5.0 million to expand efforts to combat invasive species including establishing additional Strike Teams across the country to apply proven early detection/rapid response (EDRR) techniques. A new Strike Team established in Alaska will work in partnership with the State of Alaska to develop best practices for joint Federal/State EDRR efforts to fight invasive species.

The request for the Refuge System includes \$146 million to reduce the Service's maintenance backlog and to take care of the facilities and infrastructure that the Service manages. This includes \$46 million to address the backlog in deferred maintenance. The request would maintain the Service's current commitment to reduce the maintenance backlog in the Refuge System, improving refuge management and enhancing the overall visitor experience.

Also included in the budget request for the Refuge System is \$43.2 million for refuge law enforcement. This investment will support the safety of the more than 55 million annual visitors across the Refuge System, prevent poaching and other illegal activities, and assist U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers in their critically important efforts to secure our borders.

Endangered Species

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is one of our Nation's most important wildlife conservation laws. The ESA has had notable success since its passage over 40 years ago – bald eagles and peregrine falcons, once rare in the lower 48 States, are fully recovered and we have brought species like the California condor and black-footed ferret back from the very brink of extinction. Preventing extinction and achieving recovery of listed species continues to be one of the Service's highest priorities. To further this priority, the Service's budget request proposes a total of \$240 million to implement the ESA and other laws under the Ecological Services program, including the Marine Mammal Protection Act and Coastal Barrier Resources Act.

The Service's focus on the recovery of species has resulted in eleven species delisted and downlisted and nine species proposed for delisting and downlisting in this Administration. The Ecological Services budget request includes \$95 million dedicated to the recovery of species listed under the ESA. By recovering species and returning them to State and Tribal management, we further our commitment to being a good neighbor by working with States, and

private landowners on conservation activities and are able to focus resources on those species of greatest conservation need.

The request also includes \$26.4 million for conservation and restoration activities that can help keep at-risk species off the threatened and endangered species lists and under the management of our State and Tribal partners. The Service is committed to strengthening delivery of conservation under the ESA by making it easier to work with the agency on proactive conservation efforts for species. By investing in reducing threats to species and their habitats before they become critically imperiled, future conservation efforts are likely to be less costly, more flexible, and more likely to result in successful conservation over time.

The Ecological Services budget proposal also includes \$107.5 million to facilitate planning and consultation that will support economic development while ensuring the conservation of our Nation's fish and wildlife resources. This request will support the Service's priorities, including modernizing our infrastructure and striking a regulatory balance. Funding will allow the Service to provide timely evaluations of project and work with developers, as well as private landowners on appropriate mitigation and avoidance measures, showing that responsible development and the conservation of wildlife can go hand-in-hand through a transparent and efficient permitting process.

The Administration is committed to making the ESA work for the American people. The Service's proposal for the Ecological Services program represents a significant investment in this commitment and will help us build upon the many conservation successes we have achieved in the last two years.

Migratory Birds

Migratory birds are central to several traditional recreational pastimes, including hunting and birdwatching. Migratory birds also provide insect and rodent control, plant pollination, and seed dispersal. The Service's Migratory Bird program works to conserve birds and to preserve traditional subsistence and outdoor recreational pursuits involving birds, as well as migratory bird management, cooperation with States, and environmental reviews. The program works with partners such as outdoor recreation and sporting groups, conservation organizations, Tribes, State wildlife agencies, and others to conserve habitats needed to support these populations for future generations of Americans to enjoy. The FY 2020 request for the Service's Migratory Bird program is \$49.5 million, which would provide waterfowl hunting opportunities and supports the conservation of birds.

Fish and Aquatic Conservation

The Fish and Aquatic Conservation program works with partners and the public to manage fish and other aquatic resources to achieve the goals of healthy, self-sustaining populations, and the conservation or restoration of their habitats. The economic value of fisheries conservation is substantial and well documented. In 2016, 35.8 million Americans went fishing and expended \$46.1 billion for travel, equipment, and other purchases.

The budget provides \$56.4 million in funding for National Fish Hatchery operations, which provides fish to States and Tribes, while also propagating and providing refugia for endangered

aquatic species enabling us to fulfill our trust responsibilities and Tribal partnerships. The National Fish Hatchery System also provides opportunities for the public to visit and learn about fish propagation and conservation as well as to take advantage of recreational activities on hatchery grounds. The Service requests \$25.8 million for hatchery maintenance.

Invasive species cost our economy billions of dollars each year. The adage of “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” rings true in terms of invasive species management. Therefore, to continue our commitment to addressing this important issue, the Service is proposing \$16.1 million for programs that focus on preventing the spread of Asian carp, quagga, zebra mussels, sea lamprey, and other non-native aquatic species.

Law Enforcement

The Office of Law Enforcement’s primary responsibility is to focus on significant threats to wildlife resources—illegal trade, unlawful commercial exploitation, habitat destruction, and environmental hazards. The Office of Law Enforcement investigates wildlife crimes; regulates wildlife trade; helps Americans understand and comply with wildlife protection laws; and works in partnership with international, Federal, State, and Tribal counterparts to conserve wildlife resources.

Illegal wildlife trafficking is a multi-billion dollar global business that fuels international instability and has been linked to other illicit activities such as human, arms, and drug trafficking. Our continued investment in combating wildlife trafficking is important to countering organized crime. The budget provides \$77.2 million for the Office of Law Enforcement to investigate wildlife crimes and enforce wildlife laws.

The Service continues to cooperate with the State Department, other Federal agencies, and foreign governments to disrupt transportation routes connected to the illegal wildlife trafficking supply chain. The Service will continue to cooperate with other nations to combat wildlife trafficking to halt the destruction of some of the world’s most iconic species by stopping illicit trade; ensuring sustainable legal trade; reducing demand for illegal products; and providing technical assistance and grants to other nations to develop local enforcement capabilities. The budget request will also enable the Service to implement the President’s Executive Order on Enforcing Federal Law with Respect to Transnational Criminal Organizations and Preventing International Trafficking.

International Affairs

The International Affairs program leads domestic and international efforts to protect, restore, and enhance the world’s diverse wildlife and their habitats. The Service works to ensure that wildlife trade is both legal and sustainable to benefit the survival of species and domestic economies through the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and domestic wildlife laws.

The budget requests \$16.6 million for the International Affairs program. The Service provides technical and financial assistance to partners to support innovative projects that address wildlife poaching and trafficking by strengthening international law enforcement capabilities, reducing

demand for illegally traded wildlife, and expanding international cooperation and commitment to mitigate threats.

Conclusion

The President's FY 2020 budget proposal supports his commitment to create jobs, provide outdoor recreation including hunting and fishing, facilitate infrastructure development and other economic activities, and support law enforcement needs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.