

**TESTIMONY OF DAN ASHE, DIRECTOR,
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND WILDLIFE, REGARDING
S. 357, THE WILDLIFE DISEASE EMERGENCY ACT OF 2011;
S. 1249, THE TARGET PRACTICE AND MARKSMANSHIP TRAINING SUPPORT ACT;
S. 2071, THE PERMANENT ELECTRONIC DUCK STAMP ACT OF 2012;
S. 2156, THE MIGRATORY BIRD HABITAT INVESTMENT AND ENHANCEMENT ACT
OF 2011; S. 2282, THE NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION
EXTENSION ACT; S. 1266, THE DELAWARE RIVER BASIN CONSERVATION ACT OF
2011; AND S. 1494, THE NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION
REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2011**

April 24, 2012

Introduction

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Sessions, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Dan Ashe Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) within the Department of the Interior (Department). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on bills that address multiple responsibilities of the Service for the conservation of our nation's fish and wildlife for the benefit of our citizens, including conserving migratory birds and their habitats, administering critical funding for state conservation and sportsman programs, and addressing a matter of grave and growing significance to wildlife conservation, that of wildlife disease.

The Service is the nation's premier conservation agency, dedicated to ensuring that Americans today and in future generations can enjoy the nation's abundance of wildlife, wander lands and winding waters. Whether they hunt game, cast for fish, climb trees, paddle canoes, snap photographs, ski downhill, or bike or hike up hills, the bills you are considering today will enrich their opportunities across the United States and its territories. The intrinsic value of these species and the sustainability of their populations is demonstrated through the millions of annual visitors to our National Wildlife Refuges and other federal lands; through the millions of people who support a wide array of wildlife conservation organizations and causes; and through the billions of dollars in economic impact of hunters, fishers, photographers, and watchers as they purchase equipment and trip-related services to pursue the wildlife they enjoy. The Department appreciates the support and leadership of the Committee across a myriad of conservation issues as well as this opportunity to talk about a range of these issues.

The Threat and Challenge of Wildlife Disease

Although disease is present as a natural influence on living organisms, shaping population composition of species and evolution, human alteration of natural landscapes has resulted in an alarming increase in both the incidence and severity of new and emerging diseases affecting native

fish and wildlife species in the past 40 years. These diseases can significantly impact matters of great importance to Americans in the broad categories of ecological, economic, and human health. The sources and transmission of many emerging fish and wildlife diseases are not well understood, but the impacts on affected fish and wildlife populations can be devastating. For example, white-nose syndrome in bats and *chytrid* fungus in amphibians have caused unprecedented declines in affected wildlife populations. Since its discovery in a New York cave in 2006, white-nose syndrome has killed an estimated 5 million bats, decimating populations of hibernating bats in the northeast, southeast, and Midwest States. The *chytrid* fungus has contributed to massive losses and extinctions of amphibians, including frogs and toads, in many nations around the world. As primary insectivores, both groups of species play an important ecological role in the balance of insect populations, some of which can have significant impacts on United States agriculture, as well as human health.

Diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans, like West Nile virus or rabies, are called “zoonotic”. The Centers for Disease Control reports that more than 75 percent of diseases currently classified as “new or emerging” are considered zoonotic. Rapid response to disease outbreaks can help contain them, however this requires quick access to adequate funding, coordination with partners at both the policy and ground level, and the ability to quickly ramp up infrastructure and activities. Limited and uncertain availability of resources coupled with the complexity of governance over both animal and human health – split among federal, state, and local agencies – make such responses, even to zoonotic diseases, very challenging.

Sources of disease in wild animals may include disease transmitted by domestic animals to wildlife, the intentional importation of disease organisms or vectors, accidental introduction through ballast water or on an animal that has stowed away in cargo, or it can arise through the evolution of a once-benign organism into an invasive and virulent new disease threat to humans, livestock, or other fish and wildlife species. Infectious disease organisms can include bacteria, viruses, prions, fungi, and parasites with a wide range of life cycles. Major health threats to fish and wildlife populations also arise from noninfectious diseases associated with natural toxicants and anthropogenically-derived environmental contaminants, such as pesticides, lead, and endocrine disrupting chemicals. Disease may be caused or exacerbated by declining environmental conditions, caused by human activities on the landscape, which result in loss of food, water, or structural elements that provide shelter or territory for species that have evolved to live in a particular niche. The impacts of new and more aggressive disease organisms present tremendous challenges for conservation, both through their direct impact on the productivity of animal populations and through the loss of the direct and indirect roles of these animals in their ecosystems.

As illustrated by West Nile virus, public policy is generally reactive to emerging diseases – not proactive – and maintaining focus of public resources on managing any disease in the long term, let alone taking proactive steps, can be challenging. Changes in public priorities often shift limited resources away to other problems, and animal or human health issues can quickly overwhelm available funding. However, in addition to significant ecological impacts, diseases arising in or fostered through wildlife populations can threaten humans, livestock, as well as aquatic and terrestrial species of significant ecologic and economic importance. Our ability to prevent or

respond to it requires a commitment of readily available resources and an ability to accelerate the necessary infrastructure and activities needed to effectively protect these public trust priorities.

With ever-increasing globalization and significant ecological, economic, and human health interests at stake, ensuring effective fish and wildlife disease detection, response, and management is profoundly challenging.

S. 357, the Wildlife Disease Emergency Act

The Department supports the intent of this legislation to address wildlife disease, and with further work and amendments to reflect our comments below, we would strongly support its enactment. This proposal would vest in the Secretary of the Interior the authority to identify “Wildlife Disease Emergencies” and to dedicate resources within a segregated account of funds to address them, including through the establishment of rapid response teams. It proposes to allow the Secretary to “establish a Wildlife Disease Committee to assist in increasing the level of preparedness of the United States to emerging wildlife diseases.”

Currently, the Service employs a small number of veterinarians and other animal health specialists who specialize in avian and fish health or who have wildlife health expertise. The National Park Service (NPS) also employs a small number of veterinarians who work with NPS public health officials, and both agencies contribute to the Department’s One Health Group, which facilitates coordination of actions across the Bureaus to monitor, identify, and respond to emerging diseases issues. These professionals work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Centers for Disease Control, and other federal and state agencies on a wide range of fish and wildlife health issues. The Service offers technical assistance and works cooperatively with other agencies, like USDA, that have authority to screen and stop shipments of animals or plants suspected of carrying disease that may affect agricultural interests or human health.

Both the Service and the NPS work closely with the U.S. Geological Survey’s National Wildlife Health Center, which employs a broad range of veterinary expertise and specialized facilities to provide technical assistance to state, tribal, federal, and other wildlife agencies necessary to respond to and manage diseases in order to prevent wildlife losses. The National Wildlife Health Center also conducts diagnostic investigations and research to identify emerging diseases and to understand the impact of diseases on wildlife populations, as well as to devise methods through which we can more effectively manage these threats.

The Service has in place tools and resources to address disease affecting particular groups of species, such as our nine National Fish Health Centers, which are located primarily in the Northwest, but are also in the north, south, and central regions. These Centers, which work collaboratively with the USGS Western Fisheries Research Center, play a critical role in identifying and managing fish disease in hatcheries, as well as aquatic ecosystems through the National Wild Fish Health Survey. Similarly, the NPS has a Wildlife Health Team that provides technical assistance to National Park units in preventing and managing disease. Ensuring capacity and adequate resources to address new and emerging diseases is challenging. New and emerging

diseases quickly overwhelm the systems we have been able to put in place to address existing diseases, which continue to pose threats to the sustainability of wildlife populations. Yet, addressing existing diseases is not part of S. 357, as we interpret its language.

Prevention of new diseases becomes increasingly challenging as the live animal trade grows. In November 2010, the Government Accountability Office noted the challenges that the Service and other federal agencies have in reducing the risk of disease through live animal imports. The potential for preventing disease from entering the United States through this route is not included in S. 357.

The Service has authority to list invasive species as “injurious wildlife” under the Lacey Act (Title 18), which prohibits listed species from being imported into the United States or transported across state lines. Species are almost always listed after they have already become established and are already inflicting significant ecological and economic damage. Even more challenging to the prevention of such invasions is that the increase in the number of newly listed species does not correlate with increases to biological and law enforcement support to address the problem. The problem this poses, with regard to disease, in particular, is illustrated by a recent petition to the Service to list all amphibians under the Lacey Act “injurious species” provisions. The petition is based on the threat of the *chytrid* fungus to U.S. wild amphibian populations, because it has been documented as causing massive losses of amphibians worldwide. Bullfrogs grown on farms overseas for human consumption have been found to carry the *chytrid* fungus, and if the fungus reaches wild amphibian populations through this international market or through any importation of infected amphibians, it could decimate populations of these animals in the United States. However, listing all species of amphibians as “injurious” would quickly overwhelm current law enforcement capacity.

The Service is working to improve both our implementation of the Lacey Act and our capacity to address fish and wildlife diseases. Although not focused on disease specifically, we have conducted an internal analysis of the Lacey Act and its implementation, through which we have developed draft recommendations. These are currently undergoing review. We are also working toward a more centralized, coordinated wildlife health network within the agency, and in the process we are considering existing, effective governance models, such as the core national capability that the National Park Service has established in its Biological Resource Management Division.

This legislation is a good beginning for what the Department perceives to be a growing need to develop a governance framework that can focus resources and comprehensive, coordinated efforts among all federal agencies with responsibilities related to human and animal disease to both prevent the establishment of new disease and respond to outbreaks of emerging diseases. For a fully functioning framework, however, there is a need for certain, critical components that are missing from the bill. Whether they are addressed in this legislation or in subsequent legislative proposals, the following policy items should be considered: 1) parameters on the establishment of cooperative goals toward which government action and public resources can be prioritized, such as human health, agricultural interests, wild species of economic importance, and ecosystem health; 2) a framework for multiple agencies to cooperate on the inspection and screening of imported animals;

3) a framework for multiple agencies to respond to disease outbreaks, and 4) a stable source of funding that enables rapid response to emerging diseases.

The Department supports the intent of this legislation. We are glad to work with the Committee toward provisions that can support and strengthen the existing capacity of Department Bureaus and cooperation among federal agencies to address wildlife diseases, to specifically address the prevention of disease through the inspection of animal imports, and the provision of adequate resources and infrastructure to support both prevention and response.

S. 1249, the Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act

Shooting, whether with gun or bow, is an American tradition. Creating opportunities for young Americans to experience this tradition, and pursue the goal of “marksmanship”, also provides opportunity for them to learn about responsibility, about dedication, about accomplishment. The Department supports this legislation, because it will help create such opportunities, and we would like to work with the Committee to consider some technical corrections.

The Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (16 U.S.C. 669-669i) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to cooperate with the States, through their respective State fish and game departments, in wildlife-restoration projects. The Act also provides for grants for a variety of uses including reintroduction of declining wildlife species, wildlife population surveys, species research, hunter education, acquisition of wildlife habitat, and public target ranges. Currently, Pittman-Robertson funds can only be used to pay 75 percent of the cost of building or operating a public target range. S. 1249, the Target Practice and Marksmanship Support Act, would amend the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to change the funding requirements to allow up to 90 percent of target range construction and maintenance to be paid for with Pittman-Robertson funds, thus reducing the match burden on state and local governments.

In addition, S. 1249 would amend an existing requirement that Pittman-Robertson funding used for acquiring or constructing public target ranges be obligated within two years by allowing the funds to accrue over five years. This extension would allow individual projects to be funded over multiple budget cycles and significantly enhance the ability of states to acquire and build target shooting ranges.

S. 2071, the Permanent Electronic Duck Stamp Act of 2011

The Department supports the intent of S. 2071, which would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to continue to administer a program which enables hunters to purchase Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps (Federal Duck Stamps) through approved state automated licensing systems. The proof of purchase receipt from this sale, bearing a unique serial number, serves as a permit to hunt migratory waterfowl for a limited time. This program was initiated through the Electronic Duck Stamp Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-266), which directed the Secretary to conduct a three-year pilot program to determine if this approach would provide a cost effective and convenient means for issuing migratory bird hunting and conservation stamps.

In order to hunt migratory birds in the United States, hunters are required by 16 U.S.C. 718(a) et al. to purchase a Federal Duck Stamp and to carry the stamp with them while they are hunting. In September of 2007, the Service initiated the pilot electronic Duck Stamp program (E-Stamp program), partnering with eight states: Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Maryland, Minnesota, Texas, and Wisconsin. Each participating state signed a Memorandum of Understanding to administer the E-Stamp program in cooperation with the Service, through their automated hunting license sales outlets.

Through the E-stamp program, the proof of purchase hunters receive immediately upon purchase serves as a valid permit to hunt migratory waterfowl for up to 45 days from the date of purchase or until the customer receives the physical stamp. Like the physical Federal Duck Stamp, the electronic stamp proof of purchase allows free entry into all national wildlife refuges that charge a fee.

The Electronic Duck Stamp Act of 2005 directs the Secretary to conduct and evaluate a pilot program and submit a report on whether or not the program “has provided a cost-effective and convenient means for issuing migratory-bird hunting and conservation stamps” and whether it has: (1) increased the availability of those stamps, (2) assisted states in meeting the customer service objectives of the states with respect to those stamps, (3) maintained actual stamps as an effective and viable conservation tool, and (4) maintained adequate retail availability of the physical stamp. After conclusion of the pilot program in December 2010, the Service finalized its evaluation, which included review and analysis of data from participating states, and submitted its report to Congress in September 2011.

The E-Stamp pilot program has proven to be a practical method of selling Federal Duck Stamps that is readily accepted by the stamp-buying public. Since the program’s inception, more than 600,000 electronic Duck Stamps have been sold. Sales of E-Stamps increased from 58,000 in 2007 to more than 350,000 in 2010, an increase of more than 420 percent. In 2010, E- Stamp sales accounted for more than 27 percent of total Duck Stamp sales nationwide, demonstrating the widespread acceptance of the pilot program. With few exceptions, states reported ease in administering the program, and the pilot program did not negatively affect the availability of the physical stamp or its value as an effective and viable conservation tool. E-Stamps provide an additional avenue of availability for stamp purchasers, though the program has not yet resulted in an increase in overall Federal Duck Stamp sales.

The Service has continued to administer the E-Stamp program under the authority of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act. Although we understand we can continue to administer the program without additional authorities, the Department supports the intent of S. 2071. We appreciate the support it represents for the overall Duck Stamp Program and its role in protecting wetlands that are home to a multitude of species, which, in turn, are enjoyed by those who purchase Duck Stamps.

S. 2156, the Migratory Bird Habitat Investment and Enhancement Act

An increase in the price of the Federal Duck Stamp is a priority for the Department and has been included in the President's budget proposals over the past several years, through the terms of two Presidents. The price of the Federal Duck Stamp is statutorily set through the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act. We appreciate Senator Begich's leadership and the approach taken in S. 2156 to accomplish this important increase, and we strongly support the legislation with some simple further clarifications and technical changes.

The restoration of North America's great migratory waterfowl populations is a conservation success story. It is a story that involves sportsmen in partnership with States, Congress, and Federal agencies applying science to habitat protection and restoration. Because of strategic actions taken to conserve key habitats along the four major North American flyways, migratory waterfowl populations are thriving. This work maintains our hunting tradition, and has provided a linchpin for the economies of many states supported by the recreational activities of hunters and outdoor enthusiasts.

The Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, commonly known as the Federal Duck Stamp, plays a critical role in this conservation partnership and its success story. Originally created in 1934, the Duck Stamp represents the permit required by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 to hunt waterfowl, and every waterfowl hunter is required to carry one into the field. Ninety-eight percent of the receipts from stamp sales are used to acquire important migratory bird breeding, migration, and wintering habitat, which are added to the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since 1934, sales of the Duck Stamp have helped to acquire more than 5.3 million acres of waterfowl habitat for the Refuge System. These protected lands not only benefit waterfowl, but also countless other wildlife species, as well as increase opportunities for outdoor and wildlife-dependent recreation.

The cost of the Duck Stamp has remained the same since 1991. Based on the Consumer Price Index, the stamp would need to cost more than \$24 today to have the same buying power that \$15 had in 1991. As an example, in 1991, revenue from the Duck Stamp enabled the Service to acquire 89,000 acres of habitat for the Refuge System at an average cost of \$306 an acre. In 2010, the Service was able to acquire significantly less habitat because land values had tripled to an average of \$1,091 an acre.

In his FY 2013 Budget Proposal, the President included a legislative proposal to amend the Migratory Bird and Hunting Conservation Stamp Act (16 U.S.C. 718b), to increase the sales price for Duck Stamps from \$15 to \$25, beginning in 2013. With the additional receipts that would be generated from the proposed price increase, the Service anticipates additional annual acquisition of approximately 7,000 acres in fee and approximately 10,000 acres in conservation easement. Total acres acquired for 2013 would then be approximately 24,000 acres in fee title and 33,000 acres in perpetual conservation easements. These funds can be targeted to acquire habitats for waterfowl that can provide the greatest possible conservation benefit.

S. 2156 would require the Secretary of the Interior to establish a price for the Federal Duck Stamp every 5 years, in consultation with the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, beginning with calendar year 2013. The price of the stamp would be collected by the U.S. Postal Service if the Secretary determines that all amounts collected during the previous calendar year are obligated. It also would allow the Secretary to waive requirements under the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act for such individuals the Secretary, in consultation with the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, determines to be appropriate. The Department would be glad to work with the Committee as you continue to consider this legislation.

S. 2282, the North American Wetlands Conservation Extension Act

The Department strongly supports S. 2282, which would reauthorize the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). NAWCA was originally passed by Congress in 1989 to support partnership efforts to protect and restore habitats for wetland-associated migratory birds. NAWCA provides matching grants to organizations, agencies, and individuals to carry out wetlands conservation projects in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Since its inception, this program has been among the most successful leveraged funding mechanisms for the conservation of wetland habitats that benefit waterfowl and other birds, as well as other wildlife species.

Over the past 22 years we have witnessed remarkable achievements in conservation through this landmark legislation. Partnerships applying NAWCA funds to wetland conservation projects include nationally recognized conservation organizations, State fish and wildlife agencies, local governments, grass-roots organizations, and private landowners. They have supported thousands of cooperative projects across North America, leveraging billions of partner dollars and affecting more than 27 million acres of bird habitats.

Like the Joint Ventures, NAWCA supports activities under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. However, NAWCA also focuses on the conservation of wetlands nationwide for all birds and wildlife dependent upon wetland habitats. NAWCA is widely recognized for its support of other bird conservation plans, including Partners in Flight, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, and the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan. The program's connection to these conservation plans was formalized in the 2002 reauthorization of NAWCA.

The maintenance of healthy populations of wetland-associated migratory birds in North America is dependent on the protection, restoration, and management of wetland ecosystems and associated upland habitats in the U.S. as well as in Canada and Mexico. Many North American migratory birds nest in Canada, including waterfowl species that generate the greatest economic gains for states and local economies in the United States. Many of these migratory species depend on southern U.S. and Mexican wetlands for wintering habitat. Wetlands destruction, loss of nesting cover, and degradation of migration and wintering habitat have historically contributed to significant declines in North American birds.

NAWCA projects provide wetland habitat where it is needed across the country and the continent, including in the northern breeding grounds, along widespread migration routes, and in southern

areas where some species spend the winter months. In the critical waterfowl breeding grounds of the prairie pothole region in the north-central U.S., NAWCA has conserved more than 2.1 million wetland and associated grassland acres by leveraging \$104 million in Federal funds to generate another \$170 million in partner contributions since the start of the program in 1991.

For example, the Missouri Coteau Habitat Conservation Projects have protected and restored wetland and native prairie grassland habitats, which are critically important components of North Dakota's prairie pothole ecosystem. Protecting native prairie surrounding vital prairie pothole wetlands provides essential nesting habitat for waterfowl and other species and minimizes the influx of sediments, herbicides, and pesticides into these wetlands. NAWCA projects along the Samish River in Washington State offer both breeding and migrating habitat. The Whatcom Land Trust has used NAWCA grant funds to add about 100 acres to an existing preserve, permanently protecting more of the freshwater and riparian habitats that provide critical feeding and breeding areas for waterfowl and other migrants.

NAWCA projects are reviewed by the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, which draws its strength from its diverse membership. It is comprised of the Executive Director of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, four directors of State fish and wildlife agencies representing each of the four migratory bird Flyways, and three non-profit organizations actively involved in habitat conservation. The Council has been widely viewed as a leader in international habitat conservation activities through their implementation of NAWCA.

The key to NAWCA's accomplishments is that it fosters cooperative efforts. Project proposals are developed through local partnerships, basing their objectives on the bird conservation goals and information created on a continental scale, through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the other continental bird plans, and using the best science available. These proposals are recommended by a Council of partners, and they are also shared with the Joint Ventures. The Joint Ventures review the proposals based on how well they reflect the habitat goals of the Joint Ventures in the geographic regions in which they occur.

In 2006, Congress reauthorized appropriations for the Act through fiscal year 2012, reflecting the continued support of Congress and the public support for NAWCA's goals. S. 2282 will extend authorization for the Act through fiscal year 2017. We support this bill and look forward to continuing to administer this outstanding program to build on its impressive legacy of accomplishment for both the American people and the wildlife it treasures.

S. 1266, Delaware River Basin Conservation Act of 2011

The Department supports the goals of the Delaware Basin Conservation Act of 2011, and we agree with the legislation's assertion that the Delaware River basin is a national treasure of great cultural, environmental, and ecological importance, and that it is of extraordinary value. The bill would direct the Service to establish a Delaware River Basin restoration program, under which the Director would work with relevant management entities and partners in the four-state Delaware

Basin to identify, prioritize, and implement restoration and protection activities within the Basin. Through the proposal, the Service would provide technical assistance toward restoration and establish and administer a grant program for matching grants to support restoration projects.

The Delaware River is the largest undammed river east of the Mississippi, with 330 miles of unimpeded river flow for numerous federal trust species. The Delaware Bay supports the largest known spawning aggregation of horseshoe crabs, with unique importance to migrating shorebird populations as well as to the biomedical and human health industry. Careful and prudent measures are critical for the effective conservation of this vibrant ecosystem.

The Service believes that the Delaware River basin represents the best example of a wild river system in the eastern U.S. and, as such, it can be used as a standard by which restoration efforts in other river systems are measured. Due to the proximity of the Delaware basin to a large portion of the U.S. population, the Service acknowledges the tremendous economic importance of the Delaware River as a freshwater port, drinking water supply, and as resource that enables many industries to function in the basin. However, we would like the opportunity to work with the Committee to ensure that the restoration program works with existing Service obligations in the region. We would also like to ensure that it is complementary to the North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative, through which we are working with partners to identify large-scale needs for scientific information that is not only foundational to the success of such an initiative, but can also help ensure that limited resources are used most effectively.

S. 1494, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Reauthorization Act of 2011

The Department fully supports S. 1494, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Reauthorization Act of 2011. We appreciate the leadership of Chairman Boxer, Chairman Cardin, and the bill's bipartisan cosponsors in continuing Congressional authorization for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (Foundation), which plays an important role in funding on-the-ground conservation projects and managing and leveraging taxpayers funds with private contributions. The bill reauthorizes the program through 2015 and makes amendments which strengthen the Foundation's ability to carry out its purposes.

The Foundation was established by Congress in 1984 to encourage, direct, and administer private funding to support fish and wildlife conservation, among other purposes. Its principle purpose is to match public conservation dollars with private funds toward pressing conservation needs. Working with a full complement of individuals, foundations, government agencies, non-profits, and corporations, the Foundation is able to achieve partnerships that can supply both a diversity of funding and ideas to some of our most intractable conservation challenges. Through the authorization of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Establishment Act, the Foundation receives federally appropriated funds to forge effective partnerships for locally-driven natural resource conservation efforts that support larger landscape level efforts. The Service works closely with the Foundation to develop and evaluate projects that support the Service's statutory obligations and priorities.

Since 1984, the Foundation has leveraged approximately \$576 million into over \$2 billion to fund 11,600 grants for on-the-ground projects that benefit conservation in all 50 states. This includes more than 3,700 grants supported with funding through the Service, leveraging \$174 million in Service funds into more than \$618 million for conservation. Its efforts to increase the public fund investment in the conservation of fish and wildlife resources have yielded an average 3-to-1 ratio in private matching funds, although its statutory requirement is only a 1-to-1 match.

The Service's Mission, which is "*working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people*", is greatly advanced by the work of the Foundation, and we look forward to our continued partnership in the conservation of fish and wildlife resources. The Department supports amendments proposed in S. 1494, and we strongly support reauthorization of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Conclusion

We greatly appreciate the continued interest and leadership of the Subcommittee in protecting America's fish and wildlife, in your consideration of this important legislation and in working so closely with us on myriad conservation issues. We would be pleased to work with the Committee to improve and clarify provisions in the bills for which we indicated concerns or reservations and to assist you in any way we can as this entire slate of bills continues to be considered.