

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DANIEL M. ASHE
BEFORE THE SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE
AS NOMINEE FOR
DIRECTOR OF THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Introduction

Thank you, Madam Chairman, Senator Inhofe, and Members of the Committee. I am honored to be with you today as President Barack Obama's nominee to serve the American people as Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

With your indulgence, I would like to begin with a short, personal introduction to provide some context for how I came to be here today.

Personal Background

I have been a part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) family for my entire life, so my nomination to serve as Director of this great agency represents both the opportunity of a lifetime and an honor.

I was born, and spent my childhood, in Atlanta, Georgia, where my father began what was to be a 37-year career with the Service. His is a far more interesting story than mine. Born into the industrial poverty of Connecticut's Naugatuck River Valley and educated with the aid of the GI bill, he and my mother moved to Atlanta so he could take a job with the Service. There, he advanced through a series of positions in what was then the Branch of Lands, later the Division of Realty, and ultimately rose to be Deputy Regional Director in the Service's Northeast Region. Some of my earliest and fondest childhood memories are accompanying my father to national wildlife refuges and fish hatcheries in the Southeast – such as Okefenokee, Blackbeard Island, and Chattahoochee Forest – where I learned to band birds, fish, hunt, hike, and most importantly, to simply enjoy the

outdoors. I saw Service employees in action, doing their jobs with commitment and camaraderie, something I recognized but could not put into words as a kid. I met people who would become Service legends, like Jack Watson, the colorful manager of National Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge, and former Directors John Gottschalk and Lynn Greenwalt, whose leadership and vision made distinctive contributions to the Service. My mother grew up during the great depression, in the poor working neighborhoods of Bridgeport, Connecticut. She raised five boys, and, maybe because we had nothing else to do, was always encouraging us to “go outside.” In spring and summer, she allowed our screened porch to become a veritable zoological park of lizards, snakes, turtles, orphaned birds and even the occasional baby possum or raccoon. The milkman once stopped delivering to our house because the milk box was just a perfect reptile receptacle. She demanded excellence in school, and she modeled tolerance for differences among people, but intolerance for the racial injustices of that time. More than anyone, she taught me that I could accomplish anything – whether repairing a faucet or bicycle, competing in sports, attending college, or leading a complex organization – as long as I was willing to dedicate myself fully to the task at hand and learn from my mistakes.

My parents did not actively encourage me to go into the conservation profession; they did not have to. They simply opened the door to the endless fascination of wild things and wild places and to the passion of those working to conserve our outdoor heritage. These early experiences gave me a deeply rooted appreciation for the work that the Service and its partner organizations do and a desire to play a part in it.

I followed that passion to Texas A&M University and then Florida State University, where I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in biological sciences. Later, I earned a graduate degree in marine affairs from the University of Washington. My master’s thesis, on estuarine wetland mitigation, was published in the Coastal Zone Management Journal

in 1982.

I am joined today by my wife Barbara, whom I spirited away from the State of Florida in 1979. She married a marine biologist and is fond of saying she has been moving further from the coast ever since. Barbara is the Executive Vice President for the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, so we have a marriage that represents the interconnectedness of environment and economy, and one that is always filled with lively discussion. We have two children, Mary and Michael. Both are pursuing their own course in education and life, and I am proud that they each have a burning love of the outdoors and an appreciation of what is required to conserve it.

My journey to the Nation's capital began when I was awarded a National Sea Grant Congressional Fellowship in 1982. For the next 13 years, I served as a member of the professional staff of the former Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, in the U.S. House of Representatives. During my time on Capitol Hill, I advised the Committee's Chairmen and Members on a wide range of environmental policy issues, including endangered species and biodiversity conservation, ocean and coastal resources protection, the National Wildlife Refuge System, the National Marine Sanctuaries Program, the Clean Water Act, wetlands conservation, fisheries management and conservation, and offshore oil and gas development – all issues of direct concern to the agency I am nominated to lead. My experience on the Hill gave me invaluable insight into Congressional operations and the work ethic of Members and staff, as well as an understanding and respect for the craft of policymaking that has served me well in my own work with the Service.

Track Record and Experience

When I was hired as the Service's Assistant Director for External Affairs in 1995, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to follow in my father's footsteps and make my own

contribution to an agency we both love. In that position, I directed the Service's programs in legislative, public, and Native American affairs, research coordination, and state grants-in-aid.

From 1998 to 2003, I served as the Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System, directing operation and management of the then 93 million-acre Refuge System and the Service's land acquisition program. During those five years, the Refuge System developed a promising vision, expanded its commitment to partnership, volunteerism, and "friends" organizations, and set the stage for sustained success. As a result, the System received vastly expanded public visibility, partner and community involvement, and strong support within the Administration and Congress. Today, the Refuge System stands at more than 150 million acres, 553 units, and 38 wetland management districts. I believe it is the world's finest collection of public lands and waters dedicated to fish and wildlife conservation.

Throughout much of its history, the Service has set the standard for science-based wildlife management, and, in my view, the best science must inform and underpin everything we do as an agency. I am proud to have contributed to a renaissance of science and professionalism within the Service during the six years I served as Science Advisor to the Director before becoming Deputy Director in 2009. In this capacity, I had broad responsibility to provide leadership on science policy and scientific applications to resource management. During my tenure, the Service began developing and implementing an agenda for change toward a science-driven, landscape conservation business model designed to respond to broad threats such as habitat loss and fragmentation, illegal trade in wildlife, invasive species, growing water scarcity, wildlife disease, and global climate change. I also led efforts to reemphasize the importance of scientific research and professionalism and worked to build stronger relationships with

the U.S. Geological Survey and scientific professional societies.

As a member of the Service's Directorate, I have worked hard to ensure that this commitment to scientific integrity is maintained and our responsibility to the American public is fulfilled by implementing state-of-the art approaches to strategically address the nation's most pressing conservation needs. I have also provided leadership in implementing strategic landscape conservation as our operational paradigm to ensure that we target science in the right places through thoughtful planning, monitoring of outcomes, and adaptive management.

The Service makes decisions every day that are important to the American people. The actions we take to ensure the sustainability of our nation's fish and wildlife resources affect both public and private lands and impact the quality of life, the economic well-being, and the recreational and aesthetic enjoyment of our citizens. Our decisions and actions have both immediate and long-term implications: as public servants entrusted by the American people with stewardship responsibilities for America's wildlife resources, we act on behalf of both present and future generations. Public service, social responsibility, respect for all stakeholders, and scientific integrity, are core values that serve as foundations of the professionalism upon which those that came before me built this agency. My highest aspiration as Director, if confirmed, is to strengthen those foundational core values so that this commitment to the American public can be realized and the trust placed in the agency to provide leadership in stewardship of our nation's wildlife resources can be fulfilled.

Philosophy, Priorities and Vision

My conservation philosophy is straightforward: safeguarding the Nation's fish, wildlife, and plant resources and our magnificent lands and waters requires that we recognize and capitalize on our interdependence with a larger conservation community that includes

local, state, and tribal governments; non-government organizations; the private sector; and America's private landowners. Our work must reflect a unity of purpose in what we want to achieve, the vision to recognize the opportunities in the challenges we face, a determination to move forward courageously in addressing those challenges, and an optimism that these challenges can be met. I believe these qualities define our agency and they were shared by my friend and our former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Sam Hamilton. Sam's tragic passing less than a year ago left the Service deeply wounded but, at the same time, inspired in us a strong desire to move forward in carrying out our shared vision for the Service.

Unity of Purpose

History has demonstrated that unity of purpose yields success in conserving fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. When we pull together we get things done, whether it is the creation of a system of lands and waters as a refuge for wildlife, the passage of laws to protect endangered and threatened species, or the response to a disastrous oil spill. In fact, it is my belief that unity with our state fish and wildlife agency partners is the most consequential ingredient in our success. States have the principal responsibility for fish and wildlife stewardship in America. When they are strong in that stewardship, we are strong. When they succeed, we succeed. The Service's authorities are to enhance the work of our state counterparts. This includes providing a framework for migratory bird conservation across national and international boundaries; safeguarding endangered and threatened species; regulating interstate and international wildlife trade; and acquiring and managing nationally significant habitat for wildlife and fish conservation. Sam and I often spoke about the importance of maintaining our core partnerships, particularly our crucial relationship with the states. He often characterized the importance of that relationship by saying, "Let there be no daylight between us." I also well remember that among my father's staunchest allies, and best friends, were State agency directors such as

Dick Cronin in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania's Ralph Abele. I firmly share this commitment to partnership with the states, and growing these relationships will be a key element of my agenda if I am confirmed as Director.

Unity of purpose within what we collectively call the "conservation community" is also an essential ingredient to success. Historically, this community has run the gamut from the most traditional sporting organizations to the most progressive environmental groups. The Service has often been a place where these interests come together, and that was certainly an ingredient in my successful tenure as National Wildlife Refuge System Chief. I supported, and benefitted from, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement, or CARE. This group includes a cast of organizations with very diverse missions, from the National Rifle Association to the Defenders of Wildlife, working together to support the National Wildlife Refuge System. If confirmed, you have my commitment that I will foster this type of unity as a means of strengthening natural resource conservation. I believe that no single entity, whether federal, state, tribal or private, can independently address the conservation challenges of the 21st century. We must adopt a philosophy of interdependence, which requires relationships founded in respect and trust, and I would make this a priority during my tenure as Service Director. In the Service, we are well aware that the "conservation community" includes America's private landowners. More than 70 percent of land in the continental United States is in private ownership, largely as farms, ranches, and forests, as well as land held in trust by the United States for various Indian tribes and individuals. While the Service's collaborative efforts range as far as international partnerships that conserve species of concern around the globe, they are also as near as work with individual landowners in America through programs such as Partners for Fish and Wildlife.

Vision, Determination and Optimism

I believe unity of purpose leads to a renewed and expanded vision of what is possible in conserving our natural resources. That greater vision, in turn, serves to strengthen our determination to face adversity and act with courage and optimism, even in times of uncertainty. Throughout its history, the Service has demonstrated both the vision to identify emerging environmental threats and the determination to implement critical responses, whether rising to the challenge of the 1930s Dust Bowl of J.N. “Ding” Darling’s tenure as Director, the widespread use of contaminants in Rachel Carson’s era as a Service scientist, or the depletion of wetlands in the 1980s, when my father was helping lead the organization.

We once again witnessed this vision, determination and optimism on the part of the federal government, the Service, the states, and our many conservation partners during the recent Gulf oil spill crisis. As Deputy Director during this crisis, I was proud to play a role in helping orchestrate the Service’s response, but our Service employees were the real heroes. Nearly 2,000 of them – approximately 25 percent of the Service’s workforce – worked directly on the spill, with more than 1,500 actually deploying to the Gulf Region to assist in the response after the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded and sank on the night of April 19, 2010. Service employees from all programs and pay grades cleaned tar balls off beaches; worked long hours behind the scenes hunched over laptops in Incident Command Centers; surveyed bird colonies and habitats by plane, helicopter, boat and on foot; rescued oiled birds and brought them in for cleaning; saved baby sea turtles who might otherwise have died; and volunteered for second, and third, and fourth deployments in response to the need for their services. Most important, the Service’s men and women integrated smoothly into the largest, most complex, and successful Incident Command Structure ever assembled outside of a war zone.

The work performed by the Service and its federal and State partners has been critical to

the overall response effort. We are proud to be playing a key role today, working in partnership with the States, private citizens, and the conservation community in restoring one of the most incredible ecosystems on the planet. This task will not be easy, and it won't be accomplished quickly. We are in it for the long haul. Nothing less than success is acceptable, and continuing our all-out support for Gulf Coast restoration will be among my top priorities as Director, should I be confirmed.

We are living in an era of monumental conservation challenges, including the loss and fragmentation of habitats, genetic isolation, invasive species, water scarcity, and illegal wildlife trade. We know these challenges will be compounded by continued growth, and growing affluence in human populations and the associated demands on land and water resources. We know they will be magnified by the effects of a changing climate. All of these stressors work in concert – 24 hours a day and 7 days a week – cumulatively challenging our efforts to sustain healthy, vibrant ecosystems, particularly in regard to those species already recognized as endangered, threatened, or imperiled. Our vision and our determination must be equal to these challenges.

Now more than ever our conservation work must be science-driven, and the activities we undertake for species on the ground, at individual project sites, must strategically support achievement of our conservation goals at broader scales, across entire species' ranges, or what we would call "landscapes." A more holistic conservation approach is particularly critical in understanding and responding to nationwide resource threats, such as the spread of white-nose syndrome (WNS) in bats – animals essential in our ecosystems as pollinators, seed dispersers, and providers of natural pest control. Named for the white fungus that appears on the muzzle and other body parts of hibernating bats, WNS has spread rapidly across the eastern United States, killing more than 1 million bats. The fungus has been detected as far west as Oklahoma, and is expected to continue spreading.

To effectively manage these kinds of emerging challenges and to ensure sustainable natural systems into the future, we must develop the capacity to envision and deliver conservation across connected networks of habitats, based on scientific understanding and predictions of species' needs. That is why the Service is working with its sister bureaus in the Department of the Interior and with government, non-government, and private sector partners to establish a network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs), a system of science-management partnerships working in unison to support on-the-ground strategic conservation efforts at landscape scales. LCCs operate within a specific landscape – at present, 21 geographic areas in all. Active partners include federal, state, and local governments; tribes; universities; non-governmental organizations; landowners; and others involved in resource management. Collectively, LCCs represent a national, and ultimately, international network of land, water, wildlife and cultural resource managers and interested public and private organizations.

Vision in the area of scientific capacity, capability, and excellence would also continue to be a priority for me as Director, if confirmed, as it has been in my role as Deputy Director. Science is, I believe, the key to conservation success on the ground. From the creation of the world's most comprehensive waterfowl surveys to the pioneering work on the effects of DDT on migratory birds, the Service has built a reputation for science excellence that spans decades. In recent years, we have renewed our commitment to science within the agency, taking a number of key steps including the development of the Service's first ever Scientific Code of Professional Conduct and two peer-review journals to support the work of our scientists and provide our employees with the best tools available to accomplish our conservation mission.

Through careful consultation with its partners and employees, the Service will identify additional priorities for conservation science and develop additional capacity and

partnerships to develop, acquire and apply science with unsurpassed excellence. I will aspire to continue strengthening the culture and capacities for scientific excellence as Service Director, should I be confirmed.

At the same time, we are investing in technological tools – a valuable payoff in times of tight budgets and smaller staffs. The use of Geographic Information Systems, for example, is transforming the way that our field personnel are capturing, analyzing, and managing habitat data; they are able to do in hours what otherwise would have taken months to accomplish. Our efforts to make this and other tools more widely available will have both immediate and long-term benefits. If confirmed as Director, I aspire to continue working for gains in science and technology that are reshaping the way the Service does business in the 21st Century and equipping our workforce with the necessary tools to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats – trust responsibilities that are unwavering even as our world continues to change.

In 1973, Congress passed the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by a nearly unanimous vote to protect those species in danger of extinction or under threat of becoming endangered. The Service is, in large measure, the agency entrusted with administering the Act. I believe that as a country, we can take great pride in the fact that this legislation has been a success story and has prevented the loss of hundreds of species, including the bald eagle and the peregrine falcon.

In implementing the ESA, we will identify opportunities to more fully engage states and tribes as partners in managing threatened and endangered species and their habitats as we operate within our limited resources and ever-increasing workload. More energy and attention should be focused on species recovery – the ultimate goal of the Act. If confirmed, I would work closely with the Committee on this issue.

Of equal importance is the need to address a continuing and alarming downward trend in our Nation's fish species resulting from loss in the amount and quality of freshwater, estuarine, and marine habitats. America's fisheries have sustained our people since our earliest history, and today a multi-billion-dollar industry in commercial and recreational fishing helps to support our economy. For more than 100 years, the Service's hatchery program has worked to facilitate recreational fishing and aquatic habitat restoration through partnerships with states and tribes that benefit local communities. If confirmed one of my priorities will be ensuring that our Nation's fish and aquatic communities are receiving the attention and resources necessary, including through voluntary partnerships and other capacity-building endeavors, to successfully foster fish habitat conservation and provide benefits to the American people.

Last March Secretary Salazar released *The State of the Birds 2010 Report*, which assessed the vulnerability of nearly 800 bird species to climate change and indicated that climate change will have an increasingly disruptive effect on bird species in all habitats. The Report noted that all 67 oceanic bird species, including petrels and albatrosses, are among the most vulnerable birds in the United States to climate change. For bird species that are already of conservation concern, such as the golden-cheeked warbler and the whooping crane, the added vulnerability to climate change may hasten declines or prevent recovery. Key to addressing this challenge is continued strong support and growth of partnership conservation initiatives such as Joint Ventures – self-directed, regional partnerships that deliver science-based, on-the-ground conservation.

The State of the Birds 2009 Report also highlighted examples where habitat restoration and conservation actions have reversed previous declines. These improvements are largely attributable to a strong focus on wetlands conservation and management, particularly the overwhelming success of a continental waterfowl management plan that

involved the restoration and management of more than 30 million acres of wetlands by the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The efforts through programs and initiatives like Joint Ventures have demonstrated that bird populations show amazing resilience and ability to recover when the health of their habitat is sustained or restored. When we apply conservation, conservation works.

Contributing to these conservation successes is the Service's Law Enforcement program, whose efforts I am committed to strengthening. Our Office of Law Enforcement investigates wildlife crimes, helps Americans understand and obey wildlife protection laws, works in partnership with international, state, and tribal counterparts to conserve wildlife resources and regulate wildlife trade. I am particularly concerned with bolstering those activities that combat the unlawful take and commercialization of our rarest wildlife species and address other critical threats to wildlife conservation. The Office's special agents, who pursue crimes that range from wildlife profiteering to habitat destruction, and wildlife inspectors, who provide the Nation's front-line defense against wildlife smuggling, work on more than 13,000 investigations each year. The success of this work is even more critical now as wildlife resources face new pressures from climate change and habitat transformation.

Our National Wildlife Refuge System will be front and center in this effort, as well as in the Service's climate adaptation and landscape-scale conservation strategies. If I am confirmed, I look forward to working with Secretary Salazar, in close collaboration with the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and the House Natural Resources Committee, to strengthen the integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System and chart a clear course for the System as a crucial element in shaping the Nation's environmental future.

Just as the Fish and Wildlife Service works to preserve the diversity of America's natural resources, we are also following the Department of the Interior's lead in building a workforce that reflects the diversity of the American people. My father is proud of the fact that he hired the first modern-era female refuge manager at Canaan National Wildlife Refuge in West Virginia in the mid-1970s – not very long ago. Today, the Service's workforce is strengthened by a growing gender, racial, and ethnic diversity, but we still have a long way to go.

Diversity is a long-term, ongoing commitment. If confirmed, I will commit to an increased focus on this important effort. This is not just the right thing to do for people; it is also a smart way to carry out conservation. Unity of purpose requires that the makeup of our organization be reflective of American society as a whole. We will work as an executive team to set and accomplish diversity goals, and managers and supervisors will be held accountable for achieving measurable, meaningful, and lasting results in this area. We are committed to doing a better job of marketing the Service to nontraditional audiences, committing resources, training our managers and supervisors, developing our employees, and recognizing those who have taken personal responsibility for organizational change.

Conclusion

I would be profoundly honored to become Director because of the great opportunity it gives me to be of service, both to the Nation and to an organization whose mission I strongly believe in. What I learned from my dad and from watching Service employees growing up is that public service is a privilege and a high calling, one that I answered early on in my career. The issues we are dealing with on a daily basis as a Service are very important to me and are my life's work.

Next, I am convinced that what came before, including my experience on Capitol Hill

and the four leadership positions I held in the Service, has prepared me for the task that lies ahead as Director, should I be confirmed. My desire is to apply all that I have learned from life and from some exceptional leaders I have had the chance to observe, including in the U.S. Congress, to foster the unity of purpose, create the vision, unleash the determination, and apply the spirit of optimism that are needed to ensure a sustainable future for fish and wildlife and healthy ecosystems for wildlife and people. I am excited about what is possible for the Service and for the Nation as we move forward in creating science partnerships across the public and private sectors through LCCs; as we leave “no daylight between us” in our collaboration with states and other partners; as we pursue scientific excellence within and outside our ranks to inform our decision-making; as we move forward in restoring Gulf Coast ecosystems; as we seek ways to improve our implementation of conservation laws; as we work to reconnect people to the great outdoors; and as we grow a diverse and inclusive workforce that will prepare this organization to lead our conservation mission well into the future. I believe that in every challenge there are incredible opportunities waiting to be seized upon by those with the motivation and the tenacity to do so.

And that brings me to the final, and most important reason, I would be honored to serve: the people who make up the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Our employees give everything they have to the mission out of their passion for America’s fish, wildlife and plant resources and the incredible diversity of landscapes and water bodies that support them. These employees do not need anyone to “motivate” them—they are driven by their deep-seated desire to ensure the legacy of wild places and wild things for this and future generations. What those inside the Service know is that when it comes to leadership, it is strong at every level of the organization. We are led both top down and bottom up. Some of the most exciting innovations we have undertaken, including carbon sequestration to reduce atmospheric greenhouse gases and strategic habitat conservation, were ideas that

began at the field level, where most of our workforce is employed. My job as Director, if confirmed, would be to nurture, foster, and guide that indomitable spirit of innovation, remove obstacles to our success, and lead us forward in pursuing the relationships and the organizational and scientific excellence that will be required to achieve the Service's and the Nation's conservation mission.

I am extraordinarily grateful that President Obama and Secretary Salazar have placed their trust in me as the nominee to serve as Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. If confirmed, I can assure you that I will work in a spirit of collaboration with Congress, state, tribal and federal agencies, and all stakeholders in pursuing what I know to be our mutual interests in securing the health and well-being of our Nation's fish and wildlife resources and their habitats for the benefit of the American people. I am honored and humbled at the opportunity to appear before you and happy to answer any questions you may have concerning my qualifications and willingness to lead what I believe to be the finest organization of fish and wildlife conservation professionals in the world.

###