TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND WILDLIFE ON SEVERAL BILLS TO CONSERVE FISH AND WILDLIFE, AND MANAGE INVASIVE SPECIES

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Thank you, Chairman Cardin and Senator Crapo for the opportunity to represent before you today the perspectives and support of both the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies on several significant fish and wildlife conservation bills, including the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act (S1214), the Joint Ventures for Bird Conservation Act (HR2188), the Nutria Eradication and Control Act (S1519), and others. I am Eric Schwaab, Deputy Secretary, Maryland Department of Natural Resources. The Association represents the collective perspectives of the 50 State fish and wildlife agencies, which have statutory authorities within their borders for conserving fish and wildlife, including on most public lands. We also affiliate ourselves with and endorse the testimony of my colleague Edmond Mouton from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries on nutria management (S1519) and a pilot study to control feral swine in Louisiana (S1965).

The Association promotes sound fish and wildlife management, and it is the collective voice of North America's fish and wildlife agencies. The Association provides member agencies with coordination services that deal with a range of conservation interests across the taxonomic and habitat spectrum as well as conservation education, leadership development, and international relations. The Association represents state fish and wildlife agencies on Capitol Hill and before the Administration on the pressing conservation issues including climate change, energy development, invasive species, and fish and wildlife funding. On these issues and many more, the Association works to ensure a high level of collaboration among states and between states and the federal government and non-governmental organizations. The National Fish Habitat Action Plan (S1214), the North American Wetlands Conservation Act technical adjustment (HR3433), and the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures authorization (HR 2188), all offer perfect examples of such engagement on behalf of the states.

<u>S1214 National Fish Habitat Conservation Act</u>

State fish and wildlife agencies have broad trust responsibilities for fish and other aquatic resources (e.g., mussels, crayfish, and amphibians) and they understand the importance of quality habitat and cross-boundary coordination and collaboration to manage such resources. These agencies are on the front lines of fish population and habitat management. State fish and wildlife agencies have also participated in the work of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) and observed first-hand the benefits of landscape level habitat conservation for waterfowl, other biota,

and sustaining ecological integrity of these habitats. The habitat conservation approaches associated with NAWCA are ecologically and institutionally transferable to the fisheries world and state agencies are advocates for that very outcome as represented in the architecture of S1214. We strongly support S1214 and urge favorable Committee action.

There is a critical aquatic habitat conservation need across this country. Nationally, regionally and locally we have worked for decades to reverse overfishing. This work has required substantial coordination across federal agencies, with state and tribal partners, and involving industry and other private sector partners. And it has yielded success as fishing rates have been brought to sustainable levels for many stocks. Yet at the same time, controlling overfishing alone will not ensure healthy and productive futures for our fisheries and the social and economic benefits they support. We face substantial declines in fish habitat across the country. These declines threaten to undermine gains in productivity realized through effective management of fishing related removals. Without a companion, large scale strategic effort to protect and enhance fish habitat, much of this hard work and sacrifice to rebuild fish stocks will not be sustained.

In 2004 the Association coordinated and partnered with federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, tribal interests, industry, and other interested stakeholders to create both a leadership team and a technical work group that would develop a fish habitat conservation model on a national scale. The genesis of this effort and resulting National Fish Habitat Initiative (Initiative) was initially based on recommendations from the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council. Several state fish and wildlife agencies provided staffing to the various planning efforts that ensued as well as start-up funds to support that work. The Association assisted with coordination, devoted staff participation, and secured grant funding to help support all aspects of the development of a national plan. It is important to highlight state agency and Association involvement from the very beginning to emphasize the importance of this bill to state fish and wildlife agencies. It is equally important to emphasize that this continues to be a state-driven partnership effort. The overall strength and benefits from this partnership model are attributed to its strategic perspective, and its structure, providing a framework for coordinated voluntary collaborative actions of state, federal, and local agencies, industry, non-governmental conservation organizations, and other partners. This effort creates an opportunity for these agencies and organizations to come together around landscape scale habitat concerns, prioritize strategic actions, and develop and work toward common goals and objectives to protect, restore and enhance our nation's most important freshwater, estuarine and marine fish habitats. By strategically addressing habitat concerns, the collaborative efforts can best reverse declines of fish species and enhance fishing opportunities and improve the health of aquatic habitat.

The Association and its partners always believed that a national initiative to conserve fisheries habitat would benefit greatly from federal legislation (modeled on the proven success of NAWCA). This legislation will validate the nationwide scope of the

work, empower, guide and coordinate federal agency participation, and help to secure adequate funding to achieve an ambitious mission. This National Fish Habitat Initiative started as a vision, has blossomed into a reality as the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, and will bear even more fruit with passage of this enabling legislation. Before elaborating on the positive aspects of this Act and the Association's strong support for it, it would be desirable to pause and reflect on the considerable success to date at conserving and restoring aquatic habitats on a national scale.

The development and endorsement (April 2006) of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (Plan) was a critical accomplishment. The Plan's mission is to "protect, restore, and enhance the nation's fish and aquatic communities through partnerships and foster fish habitat conservation and improve the quality of life for the American people." It is grounded in science and driven by regional partnerships with the capacity to successfully achieve these fish habitat conservation goals and objectives. The Plan has become the blueprint for the success we know today and for shaping the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act.

The Plan's implementation is currently guided by a 22-member Board comprised of national conservation leaders who are committed to aquatic habitat conservation. In only three years and with limited funding, the Board has demonstrated an enviable record of accomplishments including: establishment of science and data and communications teams; approval of a Charter; approval of interim conservation strategies and targets; development of guidelines for formation of Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHPs) and an application process for Board recognition of partnerships; development of operational budgets; and, assistance with delivering conservation dollars to regional FHPs. In sum, the footing has been laid, and architecture developed, to manage the Plan.

Fish Habitat Partnerships are the delivery mechanism for habitat conservation planning and projects; most are regional, some are system or taxonomically based. These Partnerships are analogous to Joint Ventures under NAWCA. The 2006 Plan calls for the establishment of at least 12 FHPs by 2010. Not only has that target been proven to be reasonable, it is likely to be exceeded. Nationally, the regional interest for establishing voluntary FHPs consistent with Plan and Board guidelines has far exceeded the expectations of the drafters of the Plan. To date, nine FHPs have been officially recognized by the Board and 11 additional Partnerships are considered as "candidates."

The energy and excitement are palpable from within and from without as the Partnerships meet, organize, develop strategic plans, and implement science driven conservation projects for brook trout and pacific salmon, coastal habitats and reservoirs, lakes and rivers, desert systems and pristine Alaskan waters. Nearly the entire country is now encompassed by one or more of these Partnerships supported by strong state leadership and participation in each one.

In Maryland, we are pleased to be active in two Fish Habitat Partnerships: the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture and the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership. The brook trout effort is focused on protecting habitat for the only trout species native to the east coast. Brook trout throughout the range have suffered particularly from lost and degraded habitat. The Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture formed to identify, prioritize and address major threats to brook trout. By working together, states, federal agencies and conservation partners have developed strategies to protect key watersheds, prioritize corrective actions and pool resources to treat the most significant threats first. This triage approach is resulting in better conservation success with limited resources.

The Atlantic Coast effort is geared to protecting key estuarine and inshore coastal habitats for important migratory species along the Atlantic coast. By working together at the landscape scale, partners can ensure that local conservation action is strategically undertaken across the range of a species, from spawning and nursery habitat to migratory pathways. Consider for example the striped bass, one of the most important commercially and recreationally sought fish on the east coast. With a migratory range from North Carolina to Maine, and key spawning and nursery areas in the Chesapeake Bay, North Carolina and the Hudson River, concerted action is needed to ensure range-wide habitat protection. Further, failure to protect key habitats could easily undermine the gains achieved though careful management of fishing rates that has made this a fishery management conservation success story.

Let me reflect now on some conservation actions that are already underway. In the past three years the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has supported Board and Fish Habitat Partnership priorities and invested $8.5 million supporting 188 conservation projects in 36 states. Partnership match contributed to these projects is valued at nearly $20 million. These dollars have funded riparian vegetation management, removal of barriers, such as culverts and old dams, and bank stabilization. Most importantly, these funds have been coordinated and strategically based on the collective scientific knowledge of local experts. In addition, other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service are reprogramming base funds to conduct aquatic habitat improvement projects within National Forests that will address Board and Fish Habitat Partnership priorities.

The Plan's work is based on science. State fish and wildlife agencies, the U.S. Geological Survey, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been engaged in a first ever comprehensive national aquatic habitat assessment. That initial assessment and a resulting status report will be completed in 2010. In the meantime, the work of the Board and the Partnerships has been guided by a habitat framework and interim conservation strategies and targets. Partnerships are expected to consider and have the science and other capacity of Partnership members to successfully integrate this national guidance in the development of their own strategic plans, establish objective priorities for conservation projects and assess funding requirements. Partnerships are also expected to have sufficient partners to demonstrate the capacity to implement

projects successfully, measure their benefits, account for all expenditures and report on outcomes. In addition, the Board's state and federal co-chaired Science and Data Team has devoted considerable attention to data needs, data management and reporting systems in part to ensure that local monitoring and evaluation protocols used by Partnerships will provide for a national accounting of expenditures and accomplishments.

The message is clear. The National Fish Habitat Action Plan and this legislation represent a thoughtful, planned, and strategic endeavor with the organization, science, and collaboration mechanisms to make it work. Indeed, the Plan is working and the Association supports all elements of the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act without exception or hesitation to assure its continued future success.

Let me address the question of why legislation is necessary, given that a Plan is in place, and it is producing positive conservation results based on voluntary actions. The simple reality is that the Action Plan requires formal legislative endorsement to establish the architecture and funding needed to orchestrate uniform and long-term federal direction for combining these new and related existing resources across at least 19 federal agencies. At the same time, it is coupled with appropriate acknowledgment of and provision to support and engage active state fish and wildlife agency and tribal participation to accomplish science based conservation projects supported by voluntary regional Fish Habitat Partnerships at a scale necessary to make a difference. These are among the key elements provided for in S1214 and are absolutely critical to moving this Plan to the next level of sustainable success as elaborated below.

The delivery and coordination of science-based conservation projects at a scale that will be meaningful is expensive and needs to be accountable. Bulldozers and backhoes, nursery stock and rip-rap cost money. Partnerships are expensive to administer, grant processes and accountability mechanisms require staffing, the delivery of science and technical assistance needs funds, and the Board's oversight work is not without cost. The Association appreciates these are difficult economic times, but the National Fish Habitat Action Plan outlines a plan of cost-effectiveness -- treating root causes, helping to prevent more costly interventions, and leveraging additional funds. It also provides the leadership for better coordinating existing related resources of over 19 federal agencies to avoid redundancies and achieve science-based conservation outcomes that can be measured, tracked and reported. Looking at the success of the NAWCA model, this comparable effort for fish and aquatic resources will provide an overall cost savings and at the same time insure that the most important projects will be funded and long-term measurable outcomes achieved in order to benefit the American public in all regions of our country.

The Plan offers an investment strategy to support and formalize a fledgling infrastructure already working hard unto that end. The investment will pay rich dividends -- clean water, healthy ecosystems, abundant fish, fewer ESA listings, and quality water-based places to recreate, which will also provide important economic

opportunity. Absent the funding contemplated in the Act, it will be difficult to sustain the existing momentum and voluntary coordination of federal and state agencies in progress. The Plan provides a national vision, based on lessons learned about why past investments have not adequately addressed declining fish populations associated with the failing health of our Nation's freshwater, estuarine and marine habitats. Without formal recognition of the Plan and long-term bridge resources to nurture its growth and actions, the present energy and enthusiasm needed to raise and leverage matching funds, write grants, and develop budgets cannot be sustained by the current patchwork of base funding. Even though a number of state agencies assist with funding for basic coordination and science work of the Board and Partnerships, these resources are inadequate to meet long-term goals and cannot be guaranteed to continue. States spearheaded the Plan development and recognize the necessity for this legislation. They understand that past regulatory efforts to implement conservation strategies were not adequately funded and coordinated to successfully accomplish desired outcomes. And they found that most past actions were not adequately tracked.

In order to remedy this outdated and ineffective pattern of the past, states invested seed money into this effort to demonstrate tangible benefits that will be realized with long-term and sufficient investment in the Plan outlined in the NFHCA. They now seek Congressional support and actions to take our country to the next stage and reap the same or greater benefits as achieved by NAWCA. The Plan also recognizes there will be opportunities to coordinate with NAWCA, State Wildlife Action Plans, and other programs to avoid redundancies when resources can be integrated effectively to achieve outcomes that benefit all and that would otherwise not be achieved alone.

On the project funding side of the equation, the Fish and Wildlife Service has been able to carve only $3 to $7 million out of its base budget in any given year to support Partnership projects when the documented need exceeds over $55 million over five years for 416 projects. In response to the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration's request for proposals for habitat conservation projects funded by their portion of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, approximately 800 applications were received requesting over $3 billion dollars.

In addition to the funding needs that can be addressed by the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act, there are a number of other vital benefits. The Act defines the Board and its work, ensuring legislated governance and management of Board goals over time. The Association supports the new and additional slots dedicated to Board representation (i.e., it will grow from 22 to 27 members). This validates the broad spectrum partnership foundation of the Plan and ensures the private interests of farmers, woodlot managers, and fishermen are fully represented with other interests in the delivery of voluntary, non-regulatory fish habitat conservation projects.

Funding needed for effective delivery of successful science-based conservation projects at a scale that makes a difference, combined with accountability, are keys to

success -- the efficient tracking and use of funds and outcome reporting are vital. In addition, day-to-day coordination among federal agencies, state agencies and Partnerships, are essential. The provision for a new Partnership Office is the perfect solution to effect national level coordination in support of the governing Board and Plan implementation, including ensuring the best possible level of collaboration among multiple federal agencies and others with a stake in aquatic resource conservation. To date staff support has been made available in an ad-hoc way -- one that has worked at the limited demonstration level achieved to date -- but a Partnership office is required to cost effectively deliver and support the outcomes envisioned for the long haul.

The Association is pleased to see explicit recognition of the need for state participation throughout the Act. Regional state representation on the Board, state representation in the Partnership Office, and the explicit directive for coordination in Section 10 regarding activities within states, are highly desirable.

Science must be at the heart of the Plan and the Act ensures that can be a reality by designating federal dollars for science and technical assistance to support states, tribes and Partnerships with assessment data and monitoring approaches. Even though several federal agencies have redirected staffing or funding to make sure the science foundation is not overlooked in the development and early implementation of the Plan, more secure and dedicated funding will be invaluable. States also contributed to science and data efforts, especially with respect to their fish population and habitat roles and expertise. Climate change, energy development and transmission, and invasive species and their implications for the health of the nation's waterways, all point to the need for increased technical resources or capabilities to ensure the Plan is, in fact, able to remain contemporary in the face of such pressures.

If any doubt remains, let us not forget what is at stake. The American Fisheries Society reported last year that America's fish populations are facing a conservation crisis. Nearly 40 percent of our fish species, 700 in total, are listed as imperiled and habitat degradation is clearly a driving factor. The country has been dedicated for decades to important work aimed at eliminating overfishing of many ecologically and commercially valuable fish stocks. Yet without companion efforts to restore and protect habitats, these efforts could be for naught.

Past aquatic habitat conservation approaches and models, often regulatory in nature and fragmented, have simply not stemmed the tide. A new model is needed -- one grounded in science, coordinated partnerships, and priority habitat improvement projects of a scale that is effective -- the model provided in the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. States support this approach and have invested in the Action Plan and its implementation to demonstrate to the potential benefits of full implementation. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies does as well. We have seen the Action Plan bring partners together that have the needed science expertise and more importantly the collective capacity for successful outcomes that could not be accomplished alone. We respectfully ask Congress to take the next step to build upon this support and

momentum demonstrated by these diverse science based Partnerships to implement conservation projects at a scale necessary to improve our nation's aquatic resources and contribute to the health of all Americans. We ask Congress to act expeditiously to legislatively endorse the forethought and sound conservation vision that the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act outlines in order to address our nation's aquatic habitat needs.

HR2188 The Joint Ventures for Bird Conservation Act

Bird conservation, whether for waterfowl or other migratory species, must be comprehensive in addressing the full array of bird habitat needs in all geographies where these needs exist, which is a fundamental principle of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). We thus strongly support HR2188 in providing the statutory architecture for the joint ventures, and urge favorable Committee action. Birds are invaluable to our society. With their relative freedom to move among suitable habitats, the relative ease of monitoring birds, and their important role as indicators of ecosystem health, birds are extraordinarily useful for evaluating the effects of human and environmental impacts on ecosystems and actions taken to protect or recover them. Worldwide, birds bring people from different countries together around the common goal of conservation for future generations. They are essential economic and ecological components of biodiversity and are of broad cultural significance.

Bird-watching is the fastest growing form of outdoor recreation in the United States, and has become a major component of our tourism, travel, and sporting industries. The *2006 National Survey of Fishing Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation* estimated the number of people that observe birds in the U.S. at 47.7 million. The 2002 national survey on bird-watching in the United States estimated that while watching birds, and other wildlife in 2001, the public generated $85 billion in overall economic output (about 1% of GDP), $32 billion in retail sales, and $13 billion in state and federal income taxes. The 2006 national survey estimated about 2.3 million migratory bird hunters who spent approximately $1.3 billion in 2006.

To ensure their survival, conservationists must address the threats to bird populations throughout their lifecycles. Some of the greatest threats include: (a) direct habitat loss through conversion for human uses; (b) habitat degradation; (c) food depletion for migrant birds using coasts and shorelines; (d) mortality near human population centers; and (e) habitat degradation on wintering grounds south of the U.S. border. The need is urgent and the time is right for major public-private initiatives for bird conservation.

As early as 1916, the United States and Canada recognized the need to collaborate to conserve shared bird species and established the Migratory Birds Convention. Two years later, the U.S. Congress enacted the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) to give effect to this convention. In 1936, the United States entered into a similar agreement

with Mexico. By then, wildlife management agencies and conservation groups were actively cooperating to monitor migratory waterfowl on a continental basis. The creation of the Flyway Councils in the 1950s formalized the state-federal consultation processes for the major flyways. In 1986, the governments of Canada and the United States initiated the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), now a tri-national collaboration to conserve dwindling wetland habitat and restore diminishing populations of ducks, geese, and swans. Mexico joined the partnership in 1994 to make it a truly continental effort.

Public and private organizations alike recognized the advantages of working together at the national and international levels to coordinate and strengthen the growing number of partnerships on the continent for birds. In 1999, representatives from government and non-government organizations in Canada, the United States, and Mexico created the NABCI. NABCI works to advance conservation for the long-term health of the continent's native bird species and the habitats on which they depend. In 2005, the Minister and Secretaries of the environment in the three countries formally recognized the ambitious vision and goals of NABCI by signing the *Declaration of Intent for the Conservation of North American Birds and their Habitat*. The NABCI Declaration acknowledges that to safeguard migratory birds and their habitats for future generations, conservation must take place in every stage of a species' lifecycle — throughout the geographic range of nesting, migration, and wintering habitats — the full spectrum of bird conservation.

The future of many of the 1,400 bird species that occur in North America is in jeopardy. Many populations are in decline, some moderately, some precipitously, as habitats continue to be degraded or lost throughout their ranges which can span countries, continents — even hemispheres. The recently published *State of the Birds* Report identifies the sobering declines of many bird populations as a signal of the failing health of our ecosystems. The report highlights the status, threats and solutions in connection to specific habitat types such as wetlands, grasslands, and forests. As the Report indicates, it is imperative, especially in light of future impacts of climate change, that we maintain enough high quality habitats across the hemisphere to sustain viable populations of migratory birds. This is why the Joint Ventures for Bird Habitat Conservation (HR2188) Act which emphasizes habitat conservation and management across the hemisphere, are so critical.

Joint Ventures remain one of the key programs in migratory bird conservation in United States. The bird habitat joint ventures are committed to developing their capacity to become the regional delivery agents for bird habitat conservation priorities outlined in the national, regional and international bird plans. These partnerships are the most effective delivery mechanism for bird habitat conservation in history. With modest operating budgets supplied by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Joint Ventures leverage orders of magnitude more money from partners for on-the-ground conservation projects. Joint Ventures are supported by both parties in Congress every year, but they remain under-funded. They are often described as the "delivery arm" of the major migratory bird initiatives, developing the biological

foundation for management at regional scales, and facilitating local habitat conservation through implementation plans designed to attain continental goals. They exemplify the intent of integrated bird conservation. They also provide some of the best examples of strategic habitat conservation or landscape scale planning. Strategic habitat conservation is a science-based approach to conservation focused on providing landscapes capable of sustaining fish and wildlife populations at objective levels in this case identified by the bird conservation initiatives. The Joint Ventures exemplify the benefits of private and public partnerships. The State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, including Maryland DNR, are major partners in the Joint Ventures.

Maryland is a member of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV). The ACJV partnership is focused on the conservation of habitat for native bird species in the Atlantic Flyway of the United States from Maine south to Puerto Rico. The joint venture coordinates planning and delivery of bird habitat conservation on a landscape-level scale throughout the flyway, resulting in more effective and efficient conservation.

Maryland's magnificent Chesapeake Bay and coastal bays provide habitats critical to countless species of migratory birds. Over 120,000 acres of wetlands and associated uplands are being protected through acquisition, restoration, and enhancement in 20 projects approved through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) since 1991. More than fifty partners have collaborated with $65 million to match $16 million in NAWCA funds to secure protection of these valuable wetlands. One of the most significant projects is The Chesapeake Bay Initiative. This initiative is a four-state partnership lead by Ducks Unlimited, Inc. with Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania joining forces to improve water quality within the Chesapeake Bay by restoring close to 54,000 acres of wetlands throughout the watershed.

Wintering waterfowl and waterbird species such as Canvasback, Redhead, loons and grebes depend heavily on the presence of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) beds in portions of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. Historical estimates of the geographic extent of SAV beds supported by the Bay are estimated at greater than 200,000 acres. As of 2003, seventy percent of the bay grasses had been lost. Such declines can have a dramatic impact on wintering waterfowl populations. The restoration of SAV has long been an important goal of the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) and its partners. In 2003 Maryland and its Bay Partners proposed a new goal and strategy to accelerate the protection and restoration of submerged aquatic vegetation in the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries. The enhanced bay grass restoration goal calls for the protection and restoration of 185,000 acres of bay grass by 2010. In 2003, after a careful site selection process, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources has undertaken large-scale eelgrass restoration projects in the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers and efforts are well underway to reseed and restore several locations in these important Chesapeake Bay tributaries.

The Playa Lakes Joint Venture is using strategic conservation to identify grassland habitats key to the survival of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken. In conjunction with the

Natural Resources Conservation Service, they are strategically enrolling land into Farm Bill conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program. Grasslands are recognized by many as the most imperiled ecosystem worldwide. The unique avian assemblages associated with grasslands are likewise in danger -- grassland bird populations have shown steeper, more consistent, and more geographically widespread declines than any other guild of North American bird species. The *State of the Birds* report indicates that 48% of grassland birds are of conservation concern and 55% show significant declines. The need for information on abundance, productivity, habitat use, seasonal distribution, and effects of management practices is widely recognized among resource managers. Grasslands are threatened by overgrazing, conversion to croplands, frequent haying, field abandonment and a lack of fire (both of which encourage woody growth), invasive plants, resource extraction, and urbanization.

The Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) has worked closely with its conservation partners in the Upper Snake River Region of Idaho to protect critical wetlands, riparian areas, and shrub-steppe habitats over the last decade. The IWJV helped the Teton Regional Land Trust (TRLT) and Ducks Unlimited secure a series of NAWCA grants that have been the catalyst for the perpetual protection of over 25,000 acres of valuable ranchlands in the region. NAWCA funding has enabled 6,000 acres of the 9,000 acres of conservation easement acquisitions in the Teton Basin. According to the TRLT, the staff support and science foundation provided by the IWJV was instrumental in securement of the NAWCA funding. The IWJV is currently developing science-based conservation planning tools for northern pintail, lesser scaup, sandhill cranes, and other priority species. In addition, the IWJV provided a capacity grant to a new conservation initiative in the Island Park Caldera, Henry's Lake, and Shotgun Valley area to maintain the ecological integrity of the area's intact ranchlands and improve avian habitats. Lastly, the IWJV is fully engaged with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in facilitating provision of Farm Bill funding to farmers and ranchers for priority habitat projects.

HR 3433 Amending the North American Wetlands Conservation Act

NAWCA is one of the most successful conservation programs in the U.S. and leverages on average 2 dollars for every 1 dollar of federal money. In the last 20 years, some 4,000 partners have received more than $1 billion in grants and contributed another $2 billion in matching funds. Over 25 million acres of habitat has been affected. HR3433 would allow the non-federal share of the US contribution to the costs of wetland conservation projects carried out in Canada to include cash contributions from non-US sources and allow funds from Canadian sources to account for up to half of the non-federal share of project costs. This legislation would allow Canadian projects to meet their non-federal match requirements and further enhance the Canadian and U.S. partnership through NAWCA. We strongly support HR3433 and urge favorable Committee action.

HR 3537 Reauthorization of the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program Act –

The Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to carry out the Junior Duck Stamp Program, including conducting an annual art competition to develop a stamp and licensing and marketing of the stamp. The proceeds from the stamp are used to support conservation education programs, awards and scholarships. The program also has curriculum designed to help teach wetland and wildlife conservation principles to K-12 students. H.R. 3537, reauthorizes the program, increases authorization for appropriations, removes limitations on the use of funds for administrative expenses and amends the Program's reporting requirements. The AFWA supports H.R. 3537 because it will help effectively implement an important conservation education program, and we urge favorable Committee action.

S1519 Nutria Eradication and Control Act

We strongly support S1519 and the continued authorization of this vital program that is instrumental in managing this non-native species.

Nutria are listed among the world's 100 worst invasive alien species by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Introduced from South America in the 1930's as a fur resource, they have subsequently invaded wetland and riparian habitats in 17 states in the US, damaging millions of acres of wetlands and countless miles of shoreline.

Nutria are prolific breeders and voracious feeders that outcompete native species and cause permanent loss of wetlands by destroying the root systems of wetland plants. Marsh destruction from nutria was so significant in the Chesapeake estuary that nutria control was made an integral part of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement, the interstate blueprint for Chesapeake Bay restoration.

Chesapeake marshes are the critical interface between land and water that allow the Chesapeake Bay to function ecologically. Chesapeake marshes protect water, land, and living resources. They protect agricultural lands and forests from flood events, erosion, and salt water intrusion; filter nutrients, pollutants and sediments from run-off destined for the Bay; and provide critical habitat for many species of fish and wildlife that are economically, ecologically and culturally important, including Rare, Threatened and Endangered species. By destroying marshlands, nutria threaten to interrupt and severely damage the chemical and biological underpinnings of the Chesapeake estuary.

According to economic studies, loss of marshlands has severe economic ramifications for commercial and recreational fisheries and tourism.

To date, The Maryland Nutria Partnership has removed 13,000 nutria from 150,000 acres on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay. This 'nutria-free zone' was the epicenter of the Maryland population and had the highest nutria population density. The Partnership aims for a nutria-free Delmarva Peninsula by 2014.

Studies have shown that marshes from which nutria are removed have an astonishing ability to recover if the nutria are removed in time. Nutria eradication is by far the most economical method for wetland protection and restoration in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The Delmarva Nutria Eradication Project is a model program and the techniques and methodologies developed there will be invaluable in helping to manage, eradicate, and control the spread of nutria throughout the United States and around the world.

The partnership recently convened an international team of invasive species experts to provide an independent review of the administrative and operational strategies employed by the project to date. The review team was highly impressed by the program's accomplishments to date and provided strong encouragement that the goal of nutria eradication on the Eastern Shore can be accomplished.

From 2000 through 2009 the project has used $10,834,532 in federal monies. The project is expected to continue at a cost of 1.5 million per year until completion in 2014, requiring an additional $7,500,000. Post-eradication monitoring will continue for at least four additional years at a reduced annual cost below 1,000,000. Non-federal partners have contributed more than $1,000,000 in cash and services since 2000.

It is critical that all nutria be eradicated from the region. Without total removal, the nutria population will recover and re-infest the 150,000 acres of marshland from which they have been eradicated, resulting in further degradation of Chesapeake Bay marshlands and the utter loss of the funding already invested in the project.

S1421 Listing Asian Carp as Injurious

Although time consuming, the deliberative review process conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service in response to petitions to list species as injurious under the Lacey Act is comprehensive, science based, allows thorough engagement of the state fish and wildlife agencies, requires public and industry participation, and is peer reviewed. The Secretary of the Department of the Interior has emergency authority to expeditiously list a species as injurious if necessary and appropriate. However, we do support S1421 which would statutorily designate bighead carp as injurious given that other Asian carp species are already listed as injurious, there are existing control and eradication programs for Asian carp in general, and adding bighead carp to the Lacey Act will provide another enforcement tool to minimize human-assisted spread of this species.

HR509 Marine Turtle Conservation Reauthorization Act

The Association supports the reauthorization of this important conservation program and would observe that priority focus and expenditures should remain in the international aspect of this work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to share these perspectives and support of these significant fish and wildlife conservation bills, and I would be pleased to address any questions.