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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND WILDLIFE

LEGISLATIVE HEARING on

S. 810, Great Apes Protection and Cost Savings Act of 2011 • S. 1249, Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act • S. 2071, Permanent Electronic Duck Stamp Act of 2012 • S. 357, Wildlife Disease Emergency Act of 2011 • S. 1494, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Reauthorization Act of 2011 • S. 1266, Delaware River Basin Conservation Act of 2011 • S. 2156, Migratory Bird Habitat Investment and Enhancement Act

Greg Schildwachter, PhD

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April 24, 2012

Thank you for taking up these important measures. My comments begin with the bills closest to my expertise as a professional conservationist, which includes my background as a biologist and staff director for this subcommittee, and my current practice as a consultant and advocate for sportsmen, other conservationists, and businesses and philanthropies with conservation interests. I am sure many of them hold views like those I express below but I am speaking only for myself today.

The bills concerning the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (S. 1494), the Duck Stamp (S. 2071 and S. 2156), and the Pittman-Robertson Act (S. 1249) all relate the core ethic of hunters, fishermen, and other stewards of nature. Our ethic is to create and cultivate that which we seek to enjoy: fish and wildlife and their habitats. These are essential pleasures to us in season and out as well as to the millions of others who know them as the scenery of great places for outdoor fun. These bills call upon the proven commitment of sportsmen to sustaining these treasures, which is good cause for support and a good general principle for understanding fish and wildlife issues.

The ethic beneath these bills is rooted deeper than a century in American history and is sturdy support for confidence going forward. When Theodore Roosevelt founded the first national wildlife conservation group in America – the Boone and Crockett Club (1887) – local hunting and fishing clubs had already been active for 50 years advocating for basic wildlife laws we obey to this day. Since TR later set conservation as a national issue during his presidency, sportsmen have put their passion for wildlife toward resolving the larger paradoxes of wildlife policy, such as how to secure the public trust for wildlife while supporting it with the efficiency of private enterprise. We have done it well, as NFWF, the Duck Stamp, and Pittman-Robertson have shown, and today we consider refinements that will improve these policies further.

Several of these policies are user-pay arrangements that keep costs and benefits closely tied to those who participate, but there are important general benefits also. These policies and programs use public spending for real economic rewards that self-perpetuate by turning increased participation into added opportunities to participate. I ask your help carrying this success forward.

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

I recommend passage. NFWF has proven successful in its nearly-30-year history and the bill refines its authority according to what we have learned through experience.

For example, the provisions authorizing how NFWF and public agencies may exchange funds are designed to make those transactions more efficient. NFWF already covers all overhead costs for the work done with direct appropriations. We should ensure that routine transactions do not needlessly add to those costs.

The authorization of appropriations is the central piece. As you consider it, please note that NFWF is a true – not rhetorical – investment. It returns actual dollars for a public dollar committed. This is especially relevant to your proper scrutiny of the Federal budget now underway. Nothing can be spared from this scrutiny or some meaningful reduction that helps control unsustainable deficits. For the same reason, efficient spending that helps move the economy should be recognized as such and allowed to continue working. NFWF has consistently doubled or tripled its appropriation with private dollars. It is also part of the strong multiplier effect by which conservation promotes economic activity. For example, the outdoor recreation economy that depends on fish and wildlife and habitat, generates $730 billion in total economic activity. Of this, $289 billion annually is direct retail sales. These activities also raise $88 billion in annual state and federal tax revenue.

NFWF is a valuable mixed-model between public and private conservation that is able to leverage the strengths of the governmental role in conservation with the strengths of the private sector's abilities. For example, in government, salmon conservation is a joint responsibility of several departments and bureaus, and NFWF is able to focus concerted efforts on goals through a unified program. Also, for government, response to the Gulf oil spill must necessarily be deliberate and painstaking, and NFWF is able to move fast and logically to begin the most obvious response work immediately, as it did last year.

NFWF is good business for conservation and this bill deserves your vote.

S. 2071, Permanent Electronic Duck Stamp Act of 2012; S. 2156, Migratory Bird Habitat Investment and Enhancement Act

I recommend passage of both of these bills. The Duck Stamp is the historic symbol and means of securing waterfowl habitat. But it has also been a bit frozen in time as it still only dabbles on the Internet and has not been adjusted for inflation since we all still used floppy disks.

It has proven largely successful and will be more so with the changes proposed here. This program operates with very low overhead costs and the Office of Management and Budget review in 2008 found the program largely effective and efficient. With the improvements of these two bills, more people will be able to purchase the Duck Stamp more easily and the inflation adjustment likely to follow from S. 2156 will restore some of the buying power of these conservation dollars.

Two more reasons to support upgrading the Duck Stamp program: it is one of the user-pay arrangements in sportsmen conservation and it is far more effective in achieving wetland conservation goals than regulatory schemes. It is "user-pay" on its face because you must buy one to go duck hunting, and at a deeper level because what you pay enables habitat conservation that makes it possible to go duck hunting. On the regulatory point, I refer to the detour of the last few years in which a debate over wetland regulation, which mitigates about 20,000 acres per year, has turned attention away from active conservation programs that conserve nearly 1 million acres per year supported in part by the Duck Stamp program. A vote for these bills is a move back toward what we can accomplish by action that we can never do through regulation alone.

S. 1249, Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act

I recommend passage. Shooting ranges are, like wetlands, a form of infrastructure for conservation and this bill would enable the use of existing sportsmen-conservationist dollars to pay for them, which, in turn, will create more revenue for this fund and recruit more participants to the sports that support wildlife and habitat conservation.

The bill is timely to address two pressing problems: (a) declining opportunity to participate in shooting sports and (b) obstacles to recreational shooting on public lands. Sportsmen have in the last 12 years accomplished several reviews of the status of hunting and other shooting sports that identify the issues on which the future of conservation hangs. One recurring leading issue from these studies is, simply put: we need more people to go outside and play. The need is acute for involving young people and also former participants in shooting sports, hunting, and other outdoor recreation. Shooting sports, and therefore shooting practice ranges, are a key to success.

The availability of recreational shooting opportunity is a precursor to recruiting participants to this and other forms of outdoor recreation, including hunting. Starting in 2000 when several sportsmen conservation groups formed the American Wildlife Conservation Partnership, and continuing through the work of the Sporting Conservation Council (a Federal Advisory Committee) and the publication of the 10-year Action Plan pursuant to Executive Order 13443 and its adoption by the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council, sportsmen have been repeatedly clear that we need more such opportunities.

The bill properly calls upon the Pittman-Robertson fund for support of shooting ranges. This fund collects the revenue of the Federal excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition; therefore, it is another example of the user-pay principle in conservation policy and is self-perpetuating: as we encourage more participation in recreational shooting and in hunting, we expand the customer base that pays the excise tax.

There is an issue that this bill fails to address that should be noted without delaying the progress of this bill. Shooting ranges on the lands of the Bureau of Land Management are governed by the Recreation and Public Purposes Act, which complicates arrangements noticeably in comparison to the Forest Service, which has more discretion. In fact, partly because of these complications, the BLM is, in effect, phasing out shooting ranges in parts of the country where sites are most available. I hope this issue attracts some interest from members of the committee and I offer to help find a way to address it.

S. 1266, Delaware River Basin Conservation Act of 2011

I understand this bill has already been reported. I think large-scale conservation efforts such as this one make a lot of sense, especially in watersheds that serve so many people, because this approach is more likely to spur active projects to improve resources than to rely on regulatory approaches alone.

The greatest challenges to a large-scale conservation effort are reaching agreement on a list of priority actions, sticking to that list as closely as resources and opportunities allow, and reserving some of the scarce time and money in the effort for measuring results.

I recommend focused efforts on these challenges by all involved regardless of whether this bill becomes law.

S. 357, Wildlife Disease Emergency Act of 2011

I would like to work with the sponsors of this bill to find a way to support more and better attention to wildlife diseases including white-nose syndrome. My first professional work in wildlife science concerned wildlife diseases. I applaud the motivation for this bill. Knowing how

important wildlife health is to me, I know it must be to the sponsors of this bill, but I cannot support the current bill.

I agree with ramping up attention to wildlife disease, and many state agencies, universities, conservation groups share this general view. Some challenges are new and some longstanding zoonotic disease issues such as brucellosis and bovine tuberculosis are suffering from their own success as great progress in their control has diminished interest in completing the work for the relatively small populations of people and wildlife still affected.

Several excellent institutions should be involved in any effort to bring new and renewed attention to wildlife disease. The University of Georgia has specialized in wildlife disease for more than 50 years and responds to, monitors, and studies wildlife diseases throughout its region and elsewhere in the country and the world. Other institutions in the Midwest and West do similar work. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has long overseen disease issues through its standing committee on the topic, has helped develop state capacities to manage disease, and has already established the cooperative relationships called for in the bill. The Boone and Crockett Club, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Wild Sheep Foundation, and Trout Unlimited have all responded to diseases affecting their iconic species and other wildlife.

With so many efforts already underway, I am not sure that the approach described in this bill is best, but I am certain there is a way that Federal law and programs can assist current efforts and I applaud Sen. Lautenberg and his cosponsors for their attention to this. I hope I can be helpful working with staff going forward.

S. 810, Great Apes Protection and Cost Savings Act of 2011

I have no position or advice on this bill. Respect for animals is a necessary demonstration of how important they are to us. Research is an invaluable aid to humanity and wildlife. I am aware of and support animal use and care requirements in my own field and believe the veterinary sciences have adopted detailed requirements in theirs. The specifics are beyond my expertise, so I am reserving judgment on the bill.

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Supplemental Testimony on

S. 2282, North American Wetlands Conservation Extension Act of 2012

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S. 2282, North American Wetlands Conservation Extension Act of 2012

I recommend passage. The NAWCA program conserves wetlands mainly beyond the National Wildlife Refuge System and therefore complements the Duck Stamp program. It is one of the 6 major wetland conservation programs we have and, like the Duck Stamp program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, it raises private dollars from those who most directly benefit from its results – and yet those results also benefit many others directly and all of us ultimately.

The clean extension provided by S. 2282 is exactly the right thing to do both programmatically and fiscally.

Programmatic controls on the effectiveness of this program are continuing to evolve through 2nd-party reviews that identified shortcomings in documenting the many results of the program. In response to this, the Fish and Wildlife Service has developed a tracking and accountability system that continues to improve. I am very confident in its accomplishments and quite comfortable with programs that first produce results on the ground and later develop an apparatus of paperwork to steer and refine efforts.

Fiscally, programs such as this one that are supported by private dollars from those who benefit most directly, and that provide a form of infrastructure that also benefits others, and that furthermore support jobs, services, and sales, should be prized as we find ways to balance the Federal budget. Many sportsmen and other conservationists support needed fiscal reform. We take the strategic approach – and the attendant risks – of supporting reforms in entitlement programs as well as cuts in our own programs. The nation must address the programs with the greatest effect on Federal spending, and the nation is wise to acknowledge spending that helps support and turn the economy. NAWCA is one of the latter. Like many other conservation grants, NAWCA grants produce wildlife habitat where hunters, fishermen, hikers, paddlers, birdwatchers, and many others spend money to visit while staying in hotels, hiring guides, buying equipment, and otherwise creating economic activity. It is also leveraging more than dollars: it also prompts additional habitat work on the ground that partners add on to projects at their own expense after the initial publicly-supported project is complete.