



Country Update: United States Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management

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Monarch Conservation

Thank you for the introduction.

I'll take a few minutes now to share a few highlights and discuss our progress on key conservation priorities in the past year.

- In February, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced a series of actions we will take in the United States with the National Wildlife Federation and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to help reverse the monarch butterfly's steep decline.
- These actions are designed to build on the foundational conservation work currently being implemented in our three countries by wildlife agencies, conservation organizations and partnerships like the Monarch Joint Venture.
- First, we're investing more than \$3.2 million to restore and enhance more than 200,000 acres of monarch habitat on public and private lands this year, while supporting over 750 schoolyard habitat projects and pollinator gardens nationwide.



Monarch Conservation

- These initial projects will focus on breeding and migration habitat in three priority geographies: first generation spring breeding areas in Texas and Oklahoma, summer breeding habitat in the Midwest “Corn Belt,” and areas west of the Rockies important for the western monarch population.
- We’ll also work cooperatively to increase seed availability for native milkweed and nectar plants, education and outreach programs, and other large-scale efforts across multiple geographies.
- We’ve signed a cooperative agreement with the National Wildlife Federation that will help align monarch conservation efforts, while reaching out to millions of Americans and getting them involved in monarch conservation
- In addition, we’ve provided \$1.2 million in seed money to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to establish a monarch conservation fund.



Monarch Conservation

- This fund will leverage funding from the private sector, as well as from other Federal agencies, state and local partners to support worthy monarch conservation projects, focusing on the monarch's spring and summer flyway corridor.
- NFWF has already received significant interest from multiple entities, and we're excited to see interest in the fund grow so quickly.
- I know that monarch conservation is a significant topic of conversation at this meeting, and I expect we will make significant progress here in increasing cooperative efforts to help the monarch among our three nations.



Wildlife Trafficking

- Poaching and wildlife trafficking continues to be a global scourge, and I know you share our urgent concerns about the continued slaughter of elephants, rhinos and many other iconic species.
- President Obama has requested an additional \$8 million to support our implementation of a government-wide strategy to fight poaching and wildlife trafficking.
- This includes \$4 million for increased law enforcement and conservation efforts on the ground in Africa and across the globe, and another \$4 million to expand our capacity to provide wildlife forensic analysis needed to prosecute wildlife crimes.



Wildlife Trafficking

- We continue to work with international law enforcement agencies to crack down on the illegal wildlife trade.
- Among the most significant collaborations is Operation Crash, an ongoing undercover Service investigation into rhino poaching and trafficking that has enabled the Justice Department to bring charges against 22 individuals, securing guilty pleas from many of them.
- Agents have seized dozens of rhino horns – and millions of dollars in cash, cars, gold and jewels.
- These arrests and those from other ongoing investigations have exposed the extent of the United States' connection to the poaching and trafficking crisis – and underscored our responsibility to act.



Wildlife Trafficking

- Last October, for example, we secured the indictment of multiple defendants for killing rhinos in the wild.
- Although those indicted are South African nationals, they allegedly misled American hunters into killing 11 critically endangered rhinos by representing these killings as legitimate trophy hunts.
- The United States' destruction of our stock of seized ivory has led to a cascade of action from other nations. China, Chad, France, Belgium, Hong Kong and the Philippines have followed suit and destroyed their governments' ivory stocks.
- Last July, President Obama met with heads of state from across Africa at the White House for the African Summit, where poaching and trafficking was a primary focus of discussion.



Wildlife Trafficking

- We're finalizing actions to halt virtually all domestic commercial trade in elephant ivory and rhinoceros horn – which will close loopholes enabling criminals to get illegal ivory into legal trade.
- The stakes are rising for criminals engaged in poaching and trafficking. We need to keep the pressure on.
- In addition to aggressive law enforcement, we continue to build the capacity of range countries to protect and manage their wildlife through our Wildlife Without Borders Program.
- I'm pleased to note that Congress reauthorized the sale of the Save Vanishing Species Semipostal Stamp last September.



Wildlife Trafficking

- This stamp has been a great success, giving citizens the ability to directly benefit the conservation of some of the world's most endangered animals.
- To date, more than 25 million stamps have been sold, generating nearly \$2.6 million for international wildlife conservation efforts across the globe.
- More than 47 projects in 31 countries have received funding generated by the Save Vanishing Species Stamp, matched with nearly \$5 million in funding from partner organizations.
- We look forward to discussing how our three nations can continue to improve coordination on wildlife crime and protect the world's native wildlife heritage.



National Wildlife Refuge System

- The President's FY16 budget proposal recognizes the value of the Refuge System to our nation and the world, requesting more than \$508 million for refuges, an increase of \$34 million.
- Over the past year, the Refuge System has benefited from additional protections for wildlife and habitat in some of the most threatened areas of the nation.



Pacific Islands Monument Expansion

- In September, President Obama added more than 400,000 square miles to the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. The expanded Monument now protects an area three times larger than the state of California.
- The President's action provides permanent protection for some of the world's most incredible coral reefs, endangered sea turtles, seabirds and other marine species – areas
- These hotspots of biodiversity are threatened by climate change and ocean acidification, as well as commercial fishing and other human impacts.



Duck Stamp Increase

- In October, bipartisan majorities in Congress approved the President's request to increase the price of the Federal Duck Stamp from \$15 to \$25.
- This increase restores most of the Duck Stamp's purchasing power lost since the price was last increased in 1991. It's a tremendous victory.
- With the additional funds generated by the increase, we anticipate being able to protect an estimated 17,000 additional acres of habitat every year.



Prairie Pothole Conservation

- This additional Duck Stamp funding will go to protect habitat in the Prairie Pothole Region of the Dakotas, augmenting additional funding provided by our 2012 decision to shift 70 percent of Migratory Bird Conservation Fund dollars to the potholes.
- We've created modeling applications that have enabled us to identify and target the most critical wetland and grassland habitat in the region for easements.
- The result far exceeds what we thought possible – a total of 1,397 new easement contracts protecting 153,068 grassland acres and 47,488 wetland acres. And that's just the start.



Arctic Wildlife Refuges

- The President has recommended the addition of 12.3 million acres within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- Only Congress can officially add land to the Wilderness System, but the President's endorsement is a great step forward.
- It validates the scientifically rigorous and exhaustive comprehensive conservation plan and environmental impact statement our employees worked so hard to develop.
- While we wait for Congress to act on the President's recommendation, we will manage the area to preserve its wild character to the greatest extent possible.



Urban Wildlife Initiative

- The President has requested a \$5 million increase for the Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, which will enable us to help more urban families experience the natural world.
- In September, we completed land acquisition for the 570-acre Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge just outside Albuquerque, New Mexico. This new refuge will offer unparalleled wildlife opportunities for urban families.
- We're working to strengthen partnerships and outreach efforts at other existing urban refuges.
- For example, we awarded \$1 million to the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex many of you visited this week to help the refuge reach new audiences and engage Southern California urban communities and youth



Urban Wildlife Initiative

- Rocky Mountain Arsenal will soon become the most popular urban refuge in the nation, eventually hosting more than 1 million visitors annually.
- For cities where we lack a land base, we're building Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships with community groups to increase opportunities for recreation, volunteerism, interpretive place-based education, discovery, and careers in conservation.
- We've already created fourteen Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships and expect to add several more this year.
- At Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge outside Denver, we're working with community partners on a strategy to enhance the experience that visitors have at the refuge, while continuing to improve wildlife habitat.



Greater Sage-Grouse

- We continue to implement landscape-scale, strategic conservation approaches with our state wildlife agency counterparts and other partners.
- In the West, for example, we're working with 11 states and multiple partners to improve the health of the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem and conserve the greater sage-grouse before it requires Endangered Species Act listing.
- The President's FY16 budget includes a \$4 million program increase to support these efforts.
- Conserving sage grouse habitat will benefit many other species that share the landscape – including pronghorn antelope, mule deer, burrowing owls, sharp-tailed grouse and Brewer's Sparrow.



Greater Sage-Grouse

- And it will improve the productivity of the land for local communities and working families – keeping habitat from being subdivided or developed in other ways.
- Over the past year, we've developed dozens of conservation agreements with private landowners across the West to provide habitat restoration and protection for sage-grouse habitat on tens of thousands of acres.
- Just a few weeks ago, we finalized work with landowners and the State of Wyoming to create the Sweetwater River Conservancy Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Bank, which will protect some of the best habitat in the state for sage-grouse and other species.
- The President's budget proposes an additional \$164.8 million for federal land acquisition, an overall increase of \$117.2 million above the 2015 enacted level.



Greater Sage-Grouse

- We will use these funds to develop easements with willing landowners that will protect habitat for multiple species and provide public access nationwide to places to recreate, hunt and fish.
- Other targeted increases will help us:
 - anticipate and reduce impacts of energy projects on wildlife at a landscape level, while providing faster, more flexible review;
 - increase our ability to implement recovery actions under the Endangered Species Act for species nearing delisting, and reclassify improving species from endangered to threatened; and
 - work with trustees to design and secure approval of important habitat restoration projects linked to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.



Conclusion

- I know we have much work ahead of us, but we should celebrate our successes.
- On behalf of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Secretary Jewell, and the President I want to thank all of you for your hard work over the past year in your home countries and across the continent.
- I look forward to strengthening and expanding our work together to achieve great things for waterfowl, wetlands and wildlife across North America.

