

## **Trilateral Committee Meeting**

### **2014 U.S. Country Update Remarks for Director Dan Ashe**

**15 minutes**

- **Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act**
- **Migratory Bird Conservation Fund**
- **NAWCA**
- **Pollinators**

### **Thanks/Welcomes**

- Good morning and thank you for coming here. I want to especially thank Jorge Maksabedian de la Roquette, *Director General for Wildlife, Mexico and Head of the Mexican Delegation* for hosting us here. And thank you for your dedication to conservation.
  
- I'd like to extend a warm welcome to Susan Milburn Hopwood. The United States is happy to stand with your country and we look forward to opportunities to work together. *Director General of the Canadian Wildlife Service and Head of the Canadian Delegation and attending her first Trilateral.*

- I know that we all have our own areas of concern or interest, so I just want to share a few of the top priorities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and see where we can work together.
- We're at a pivotal time in conservation history. The choices we make here, and now, will have a profound effect on the way people experience the world for generations to come.
- The unprecedented scale and complexity of the challenges facing the world's wildlife and ecosystems requires us to transform the way we accomplish our mission. Achieving a sustainable future for wildlife resources in the face of increasing urbanization, rapid climate change, and large-scale habitat fragmentation requires new approaches and strategic partnerships that account for the needs of people who live on the landscape.
- You can see many of our conservation priorities in the President's 2015 budget request, which provides \$1.5 billion, an increase of \$48.8 million over the 2014 enacted level.
- For example, we're requesting a \$3 million increase to implement the National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking.

- **Wildlife trafficking** has become a global crisis, imperiling both fragile ecosystems and regional security and stability.
  
- Decades of international efforts to protect and restore wildlife populations are at risk, as rising affluence in Asia and other parts of the world fuels increasing demand for wildlife products and drives prices steadily upward.
  
- The poaching of African elephants for ivory and rhinos for their horns has reached unprecedented levels in the modern era, and illegal trade is undermining the conservation of scores of other species.
  
- The United States is a major consumer of wildlife products, legal and illegal, so U.S. leadership is vital to this struggle.
  
- We saw that when we crushed the United States' stock of seized illegal ivory last year, other countries have followed suit and destroyed illegal ivory.



- We recognize that these actions will impact those who are trading in antiques and legally acquired ivory. We are actively engaging with musicians and musical instrument manufacturers, antiques dealers, and other industry groups that have a vested interest in the ivory trade.
  
- We are looking for solutions and common ground.
  
- But ... we must respond to this unprecedented poaching crisis with a strong and enforceable legal framework to curb the trade that is driving the illegal killing.
  
- Without a strong response, we are consigning elephants to picture books.
  
- This is a global problem that demands a global solution. It will take the combined efforts of nonprofits, corporations, individuals and foreign government partners to effectively address the problem.
  
- We ask for and welcome your help.

- We're requesting \$476.4 million for the **National Wildlife Refuge System**, an increase of \$4.2 million, to catalyze voluntary conservation efforts on surrounding public and private lands. Our goal is to magnify the conservation benefits of our refuges. While every unit of the system provides important habitat for wildlife, they can also be a catalyst for larger, voluntary efforts to conserve important habitat on surrounding public and private lands. By working with partners, we can leverage available resources to benefit wildlife and keep working families on the land they've stewarded for generations.
  
- The newest units of the Refuge System reflect these priorities, representing locally-supported, partnership driven conservation efforts that respect and recognize the contributions of private landowners in conserving wildlife habitat at a landscape scale. The 2015 budget includes \$168.8 million for land acquisition for these important natural areas, funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This includes \$55.0 million in current funding and \$113.8 million in proposed permanent funding, an overall increase of \$114.4 million above the 2014 enacted level. Funding would help acquire important natural areas in the California desert, the Dakota tallgrass prairie, Florida/Georgia Longleaf pine, and the

Rappahanock, Silvio Conte and Bear River National Wildlife Refuges.

- **Expanded Outdoor Recreation Opportunities** - While the Refuge System's benefits to wildlife are measured in many ways, refuges also play crucial roles in local communities.
- By protecting wetlands, grasslands, forests, wilderness and other habitats, wildlife refuges improve air and water quality, relieve flooding, improve soil quality and trap greenhouse gases.
- They are also major drivers of economic growth, especially in rural communities. Our latest survey indicates that yearly expenditures related hunting, fishing and wildlife-related recreation are approximately \$145 billion.
- That's why expanding efforts to help Americans experience their refuge system is so important.
- We're committed to expanding hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities across the Refuge System, wherever it's compatible with the mission and purposes of the refuge.

- The President's budget request includes an increase of \$1.46 million for Visitor Services and Refuge Law Enforcement that will support expanded opportunities and ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for visitors.
  
- **Engaging the Next Generation** – As urbanization accelerates, many Americans find it increasingly difficult to experience nature. This has profound implications for the health and well-being of millions of people, especially youth. It also has profound implications for conservation in the future.
  
- Research shows that people who view nature as an abstraction are much less likely to understand and support conservation. And studies are finding that children who spend more time active in nature are physically healthier, cognitively more advanced, and suffer fewer emotional problems than children who aren't afforded those opportunities.
  
- As a critical component of Secretary Jewell's strategy for **youth engagement**, the budget includes \$13.5 million for youth programs.

- The budget includes a \$2.5 million increase for the **Urban Wildlife Refuges Partnership**, which will invite city dwellers to enjoy outdoor adventures by creating “stepping stones of engagement” to allow new audiences to connect easily with the outdoors.
  
- The Service’s urban wildlife refuge program will help make the work of the agency relevant to the lives of urban audiences and provide many ways they can participate, including a wide variety of nature-based experiences and opportunities.
  
- To connect city dwellers to nature, the National Wildlife Refuge System has established eight pilot Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships. With these partnerships, the Service will meet people where they live, work and play, whether that’s a schoolyard habitat or a community park. The Service will rely on the partners in this program – community organizations that are already practicing conservation – to share their community expertise, their knowledge and their relationships.

- Through this effort, the Service will also partner with local communities and educational organizations, such as minority-serving colleges and universities, to offer opportunities for youth to engage with science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers by volunteering to support programs at urban wildlife refuges.
  
- **Improving our Understanding** – In order to deliver the most effective and efficient conservation, our work must be focused on explicit, measureable conservation objectives that provide the greatest benefits to the broadest spectrum of species and habitats.
  
- This requires access to the best available scientific and technical information to provide our workforce with the tools to inform conservation decisions and actions.
  
- We will continue to support and develop shared science capabilities with our partners in national networks of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and Climate Science Centers to understand and help manage for change on the landscape.
  
- These partnerships help advance our collective understanding of

what is happening on the landscape, and provide a forum for partners to align their conservation work with that of other agencies and organizations to maximize its impact.

- Our budget requests an increase of \$17.7 million for science-related activities. This funding will underwrite research designed to answer important questions, including how to better address White Nose Syndrome to help save endangered bats; whether barred owl removal improves conditions for spotted owls; and how to minimize effects of energy development and transmission projects on bald and golden eagles, bats, and other species.
  
- We will also use science to identify the right species to protect and prioritize the actions on the landscape that will have the greatest benefit for those species. Rather than conserving species on a thousand isolated plots, we can work together to restore and protect larger blocks of connected habitat.
  
- **Powering Our Future** – The development of diversified energy sources, from renewable sources as well as fossil fuels, is a fundamental part of our nation’s energy strategy.

- However, if placed at the wrong locations or designed improperly, energy projects can have significant negative impacts on fish, wildlife and their habitats.
  
- We continue to focus on landscape-level planning that anticipates and reduces impacts to migratory birds, bats and imperiled species at a population level.
  
- The budget proposes \$16.7 million, an increase of \$2.5 million, for activities associated with energy development, including a program increase of \$1.1 million to support review of renewable energy projects.
  
- The budget maintains funding for migratory bird conservation to help address the impact of development, particularly wind energy projects, on wildlife and wildlife habitat.
  
- **Delisting and Downlisting** – The purpose of the Endangered Species Act is to prevent extinction and support recovery of species – not to serve as a long-term wildlife management tool.

- Once recovery is achieved, we need to refocus our limited resources on other species with greater needs, many of which are teetering on the edge of extinction.
- In addition, we need to keep our promise to the American people by delisting recovered species and returning management to our state wildlife agency partners – and by downlisting species that no longer meet the definition of endangered to provide additional management flexibility where warranted.
- In the past, litigation-fueled deadlines forced us to focus almost exclusively on adding species to the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. The multi-district litigation settlement reached in 2012 has significantly reduced those burdens, enabling us to put a greater emphasis on delisting and reclassification.
- The budget proposes to invest \$2 million in delisting and downlisting efforts, allowing us to remove unnecessary regulation.
- **Grant Programs** - The budget request for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund is \$34.1 million, equal to the 2014 level. Likewise, the request for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Grant Program is \$3.66 million, equal to the 2014 enacted level.

- **Legislative Proposals** – The Federal Duck Stamp Program provides vital funding for land acquisition and protection in the Prairie Pothole Region - the cradle of North America's waterfowl breeding habitat - and in other breeding, resting and wintering habitat nationwide.
  
- But the price of the Duck Stamp hasn't increased in more than two decades, and our ability to protect vital habitat continues to decline.
  
- The President's budget asks Congress to approve a much overdue increase in the price of the stamp. Raising the price of the stamp from \$15 to \$25 would enable us to protect an estimated 17,000 additional acres of waterfowl habitat every year.
  
- **Conclusion**
- The actions we take now will have repercussions for generations. The native species and ecosystems of our planet support billions of people and drive the world's economy. Everyone has a stake in sustaining these fragile ecosystems and species.