

**COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION
PLANNING AND THE OPERATION
AND MAINTENANCE BACKLOG IN
THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
SYSTEM**

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION,
WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

OF THE
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLANNING AND THE OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE BACKLOG IN THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

**Thursday, March 29, 2001
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans
Committee on Resources
Washington, DC**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 9:50 a.m., in Room 1334, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Wayne T. Gilchrest [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE WAYNE T. GILCHREST, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MARYLAND

Mr. GILCHREST. I think what we will do this morning, we have Dan Ashe of the Fish and Wildlife Service; Mr. Bill Horn, Director of National/International Affairs and Washington Counsel, Wildlife Legislative Fund of America, Bill, if you will come up; and we have Mr. Daniel Beard, Senior Vice President of the National Audubon Society, Mr. Beard, if you will come up; and Dr. Rollin Sparrowe, President of the Wildlife Management Institute. Is Dr. Sparrowe here? And Mr. Curtis Bohlen, Chairman of the Board, National Wildlife Refuge Association. Is Mr. Bohlen here? Oh, there he is. Yes, sir, there is Mr. Bohlen. Now, is Dr. Sparrowe here yet? Not here yet.

Thank you, gentlemen. We look forward to your testimony so we can uncover the mystery behind the backlog on our wildlife refuges and try to understand the nature of how we should manage and create conservation programs for our refuges.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gilchrest follows:]

Statement of The Honorable Wayne T. Gilchrest, Chairman, Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Now that the markup is complete, the Subcommittee will begin its hearing on comprehensive conservation planning and the operation and maintenance backlog in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The statutory mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States

for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans . The System also supports compatible recreation and an extensive public education program.

In 1997, Congress directed the Service to prepare comprehensive conservation plans for national wildlife refuges within 15 years. I understand that 22 of those plans are complete, and look forward to hearing from the witnesses today on what is needed to complete this planning process.

To manage the fish, wildlife, and plant resources on 94 million acres of System land and host over 35 million visitors, the Service employs a large experienced staff, an enthusiastic and indispensable volunteer corps, and an extensive inventory of facilities and equipment. These facilities include about 5,000 buildings; 2,000 utility systems; over 10,000 miles of dikes and levees; about 5,500 miles of public roads; and over 10,000 miles of fences.

Last year the Service received \$261 million to operate and maintain the System. This covers the paychecks and materials needed to keep the employees, volunteers, facilities and equipment at work throughout the year. Unfortunately, the Service estimates that it needs significant additional Of&M resources to fulfill its mission, goals, visitor needs, and the various legal and regulatory mandates that Congress has placed on the System. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses how to meet those additional needs which are essential to the effective operation of the System in the future.

Mr. GILCHREST. Before we begin, Mr. Underwood, do you have any opening statement? I will recognize the gentleman from Guam.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ROBERT A. UNDERWOOD, A
DELEGATE TO CONGRESS FROM GUAM**

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning again.

After reading through the background memo for this morning's hearing and learning more about the billion dollar operations of the Wildlife Service, maintenance and construction backlog, I was a little concerned.

I am also reminded of the old saying that, when you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is to stop digging, but, Mr. Chairman, it appears that neither the Fish and Wildlife Service nor the Congress have put down their shovels yet. Moreover, if the magnitude of the projected cuts for the Department of the Interior, as outlined by the President's Fiscal Year Budget 2002 Summary are anywhere near accurate, it would appear that the President may start digging his own hole as well.

We are faced with a quandary. The National Wildlife Refuge System, the only system of Federal lands dedicated exclusively for fish and wildlife conservation, may be a victim of its success. Obviously, the continued expansion of the Refuge System by both the Fish and Wildlife Service and Congress, has fueled additional budgetary demands. But the reality is that both the Service and the Congress are responding to the public's support for expanded opportunity to observe and enjoy fish and wildlife resources. In fact, dedicated funding to support Federal and state land acquisition for fish and wildlife habitat was one of the few provisions of the CARA legislation supported by an overwhelming majority in the House last Congress.

I am sympathetic to the dilemma confronting refuge managers. We should not forget that many of the factors contributing to this backlog are beyond their control. Equipment does wear out and need replacement; facilities do deteriorate and need renovation. Increased public visitation does create new stresses and demands.

These factors, all of these factors contribute to the frustration that I am sure many people in the Refuge System experience on a daily basis.

Mr. Chairman, if the Refuge System ever hopes to address new challenges, such as the comprehensive conservation planning and invasive species eradication, Congress and the administration will need to summon the will to take steps toward eliminating this backlog. The inescapable reality is that if we want to provide the type of refuge system that the public wants and expects, we will have to find the funds to pay for it. With these thoughts in mind, I welcome our witnesses, and I look forward to hearing your views as well as the views of the other members of the Committee.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Underwood follows:]

**Statement of The Honorable Robert Underwood, Ranking Democrat,
Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and good morning.

After reading through the background memo for this morning's hearing and learning more about the billion dollar operations, maintenance and construction backlog afflicting our National Wildlife Refuge System, I was distressed.

I was also reminded of the old saying, When you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do, is to stop digging. But, Mr. Chairman, it would appear that neither the Fish and Wildlife Service nor the Congress have put down their shovels yet.

Moreover, if the magnitude of projected budget cuts for the Department of the Interior as outlined in the President's Fiscal Year 2002 budget summary are anywhere near accurate, it would appear that the Bush Administration may start digging its own hole with backhoe.

Mr. Chairman, we are faced with a quandary. The National Wildlife Refuge System the only system of Federal lands dedicated exclusively for fish and wildlife conservation may be a victim of its own success.

Obviously the continued expansion of the Refuge System, by both the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Congress, has fueled additional budgetary demands. But the reality is that the Service and the Congress are simply responding to the public's unrelenting demand for expanded opportunities to observe and enjoy fish and wildlife resources.

In fact, dedicated funding to support Federal and state land acquisition for fish and wildlife habitat was one of the key provisions of the CARA legislation supported by an overwhelming majority in the House last Congress.

I am sympathetic to the dilemma confronting refuge managers. We should not forget that many factors contributing to this backlog are beyond their control: equipment does wear out and need replacement; facilities do deteriorate and need renovation; increased public visitation does create new stresses and demands, especially for law enforcement. All of these factors frustrate the Refuge System from realizing its true potential.

Mr. Chairman, if the Refuge System ever hopes to address new challenges such as comprehensive conservation planning and invasive species eradication, Congress and the Administration will need to summon the will to eliminate this backlog. The inescapable reality is that if we want to provide the type of Refuge System that the public wants and expects, we will have to pay for it.

With those thoughts in mind, I welcome our witnesses, and I look forward to hearing your views.

Thank you.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you, Mr. Underwood.
Mr. Pombo? Mr. Jones?

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE WALTER B. JONES, JR., A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF
NORTH CAROLINA**

Mr. JONES. Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit a statement for the record, but I also look forward to this hearing. We have a lodge

known as Lake Mattamuskeet Lodge that is 85-years-old in the district. And I want to say that the relationship with Fish and Wildlife in the Third District of North Carolina has been excellent, and we very much appreciate that relationship, but we have got a real serious problem as it relates to the structure of the lodge at Lake Mattamuskeet, and at the proper time I will have questions I would like to ask of the panel. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Jones follows:]

**Statement of The Honorable Walter B. Jones, Jr., a Representative in
Congress from the State of North Carolina**

Thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this important hearing.

I first want to start off by saying that I consider myself fortunate to have the United States Fish & Wildlife Service play such a prominent role in North Carolina. In my Congressional district there are eight National Wildlife Refuges and the stewardship provided by the Fish & Wildlife Service has been nothing short of exemplary. You have been a flexible and honest partner with my constituents and me and for that I thank you.

But we have a monumental challenge before us. As many of you know, the US Fish & Wildlife Service closed the Lodge at Lake Mattamuskeet Wildlife Refuge in November of last year. While the closure of the 85-year old structure was warranted due to structural and safety concerns, many in North Carolina and elsewhere were disappointed.

The Lodge has a special place in Eastern North Carolina heritage. Lake Mattamuskeet Lodge has played a number of differing roles in its long and proud history. When first built in 1915 it was at that time the largest capacity pumping plant in the world. In 1934 the United States government bought Lake Mattamuskeet and created a migratory bird refuge on the property. The pumping plant was converted into the Lodge and the site was open to the public from 1937 until 1974. Although closed to the public, the structure was placed on the National Historic Register in 1981.

The Lodge reopened in 1993 and has since served as an environmental education facility, cultural activity center, community center and conference center. Every year the Mattamuskeet Wildlife Refuge serves as the gathering point for Swan Days, in which the Lodge serves as the centerpiece for this wildly popular and well-attended event.

Cost estimates for repairs to the United Fish & Wildlife Service facility are \$3 million to make the Lodge safe and an additional \$5.7 million to renovate the structure so future generations may also enjoy this unique part of American heritage. A local citizens group, Partnership for the Sounds, has contributed more than \$800,000 to the Lodge over the past few years and without them the Lodge never would've been reopened in 1993.

As this is part of its inventory, the United States Department of the Interior bears the Federal responsibility for the preservation of this building. Further deterioration of this structure is not an option. Somebody at the Department and the Fish & Wildlife Service needs to make this a priority. Under the previous Administration, the Department of Interior conducted what I like to refer as "museum maintenance" on public lands, a "look but don't touch" approach to infrastructure maintenance. On the other hand, I am encouraged by President Bush and Secretary Norton's statements regarding deferred maintenance on our Federal lands. With the National Wildlife Refuge Centennial celebration fast approaching, it is critical we erase this maintenance backlog.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and I look forward to the testimony offered by the witnesses.

Mr. GILCHREST. Yes, sir? Dr. Sparrowe, welcome to the hearing.

Dr. SPARROWE. Thank you.

Mr. GILCHREST. And we just barely got started, so you haven't missed anything other than a few comments from the elected officials, so other than that, you are just fine.

We look forward to your testimony, and what we are going to try to understand here this morning, from your collective perspectives,

is how we can pursue aggressively the problem with the maintenance backlog in the Nation's refuge system, raise the level of awareness to refuges to as close to the level of awareness from the public and elected officials of our national parks, and try to understand, from your perspectives, the best way to conserve the biological diversity of the various refuges in different parts of the country to meet the needs of wildlife, and the desires of people to see and use those refuges.

So we will start with Mr. Dan Ashe.

STATEMENT OF DAN ASHE, CHIEF OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. ASHE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. These are historic times for the National Wildlife Refuge System. We are approaching our 100th birthday, and many events have unfolded during the last few years that I think are building consensus and momentum that promise to make the Refuge System even a more powerful conservation tool, and will open ever greater opportunities for Americans to enjoy their wildlife heritage.

In 1997 the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act spelled out a wildlife conservation mission for the Refuge System, and also recognized the outstanding opportunities that our refuges provide for compatible wildlife-dependent recreation.

In 1998 the Congress passed the Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement Act, and our relationship with community supporters has flourished since then. There are now nearly 200 friends and cooperating associations on our refuges nationwide, and our legion of volunteers has grown to about 30,000, ten times our employee work force.

In October 1998 the Service brought together all of its refuge managers for the first time ever, and the plan that sprang from that gathering, Fulfilling the Promise, gives us a compass to follow as we attempt to build a stronger refuge system.

Congress, again, in the last congress, recognized the 100th anniversary of the Refuge System by passing the National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Act, and that law challenges us to use the occasion of the Refuge System centennial to broaden our public understanding, expand partnerships and strengthen our stewardship.

As a result of these and many other significant events, we have developed a strong consensus on the future direction of the Refuge System.

As we look to the future, our greatest responsibility and priority is taking care of what we have, the maintenance of the facilities and equipment that we need to accomplish our mission. The refuge system has \$7 billion worth of buildings, utilities, dikes, levees, roads, trails, vehicles and tools, that we must maintain in order to protect their value, keep them safe and in good working order.

Currently our backlog of deferred maintenance includes over 8,000 projects totaling about \$830 million. In Fiscal Year 2001 we have about \$95 million available to address refuge maintenance needs, and with this level of funding, we will make additional progress toward our ultimate goal of reducing the maintenance backlog. We have made progress toward addressing our highest priority maintenance needs, and we have slowed the rate of growth

in our maintenance backlog from 30 percent annually just a few years ago, to about 7 percent today.

As with maintenance, we are also attempting to inventory and prioritize our operational needs. Our refuge operating needs system currently catalogs \$1.1 billion in refuge operational projects. Many of our refuges do not have a full-time biologist or law enforcement officer, or have the resources to support monitoring wildlife populations and habitat conditions, essential parts of the successful operation of a refuge.

Mr. Chairman, one of our most pressing operational needs is the development of and implementation of comprehensive conservation plans or CCPs for our refuges. These plans provide a long-term vision and serve as a foundation for sound and consistent and participatory refuge management. To date we have completed 22 comprehensive conservation plans. Another 72 are under way. A total of 282 comprehensive conservation plans will ultimately need to be completed.

The initial plans are always the most difficult, and on some of our refuges, our planning efforts are being complicated by limited staff, training, and shortcomings in good scientific background information.

We have learned a great deal in our efforts to date. For example, in the comprehensive conservation planning for National Wildlife Refuges in Western Tennessee, we are working jointly with State officials to plan for our refuges and for State-managed areas concurrently. By planning in this manner, we are involving partners, we are sharing resources, and expenses, and we are developing a better product.

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate your support and the Committee's support in helping us meet our operational needs. Since 1997 funding for refuge operations has increased from \$155 million to \$225 million. Our people continue to do great work on the ground. They manage refuges to provide tremendous benefits for wildlife and spectacular opportunities for Americans to get outdoors and enjoy their wildlife heritage. We are getting increasingly important work from our growing volunteer force. We are getting expanding support from our refuge friends' groups and cooperating associations. We are growing our fee demonstration program. In short, we are being innovative in meeting our needs, which I believe has always been a hallmark of our refuge managers and the Refuge System.

The Service has made substantial progress in identifying and categorizing its priority operation and maintenance needs, an essential step in developing a long-term plan for meeting those needs. By working together, we can celebrate our first century of wildlife conservation by building a centennial legacy that fulfills the promises we have made for our second century.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Committee members, for giving me this time to share my thoughts with you, and I am looking forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ashe follows:]

**Statement of Dan Ashe, Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System,
U.S. Department of the Interior**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to address the operations and maintenance needs of America's National Wildlife Refuge System and the com-

prehensive conservation planning process. We appreciate the chance to join with you and reflect upon the Refuge System's nearly one hundred years of service to the American people, assess our progress in advancing the System's conservation mission, and identify our needs and opportunities as we look toward a new century of conservation.

These are historic times for the National Wildlife Refuge System. As we approach the centennial anniversary, we are proud of the progress we have made together in strengthening the Refuge System. Several important events during the last few years have given us the opportunity to make the Refuge System an even more powerful conservation tool and to provide even greater opportunities for people to enjoy the Refuge System. These events set the stage for us to address our most pressing operational and maintenance needs, and to develop comprehensive conservation plans for each refuge in the System.

The first important milestone occurred in 1997, when a concerted bipartisan effort led to the passage of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. The Refuge System Improvement Act spelled out a singular wildlife conservation mission for the Refuge System:

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

In the House Report accompanying the bill, this Committee left no doubt:

... the fundamental mission of our Refuge System is wildlife conservation: wildlife and wildlife conservation must come first.

The Refuge System Improvement Act also recognized the outstanding recreational opportunities on refuges. The Refuge System has long provided some of the Nation's best hunting and fishing, and our refuges continue to support these deeply rooted American traditions. The law established compatible wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation, as priority public uses of the Refuge System.

Among other things, this far-reaching law required comprehensive conservation planning for each refuge, and set standards to assure that all uses of refuges were compatible with their purposes and the System's wildlife conservation mission. It also required that we conserve the biological diversity, integrity, and environmental health of refuges, and that we consider the conservation of the ecosystems of the United States in planning the growth of the Refuge System.

Building on the Refuge System Improvement Act, Congress, in 1998, passed the Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement Act. As a result, the Service's relationship with community supporters has flourished. There are now nearly 200 Friends and Audubon Refuge Keeper (ARK) groups across the country working actively with the Service to conserve wildlife and serve refuge visitors. The number of volunteers supporting the National Wildlife Refuge System (about 30,000) is more than ten times the number of its actual workforce. Volunteers perform 25 percent of all work on refuges nationwide. Given those figures, it is easy to see why these programs are so important to a healthy and vibrant Refuge System. As you know, great active Friends groups like those at Blackwater NWR are a backbone of support. Our volunteers are an intrinsic part of the day-to-day operation of refuges. We cannot do our job without them. We need more of them.

In October 1998, the Service convened all of its refuge managers for the first time in the 95-year history of the Refuge System. This historic gathering took place in Keystone, Colorado. The refuge managers were joined by the Service leadership and hundreds of our conservation partners with a goal of crafting consensus around a strategic vision for the Refuge System that would meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, and guide us in implementing the provisions of the Refuge System Improvement Act. The plan that sprang from Keystone Fulfilling the Promise—was built from the ground up by the field employees who maintain and manage our national wildlife refuges, but also incorporated the insights of the agency's senior managers, its biologists, law enforcement officers and realty professionals, and our partners, friends and volunteers.

Reinforcing the Refuge System Improvement Act's provisions to raise public understanding and appreciation for the Refuge System, Congress recognized the 100th anniversary of the Refuge System as an opportunity for celebration, commemoration, and also as a time to invest in its conservation legacy by passing the National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Act of 2000 with overwhelming bipartisan support.

This law calls for bold action on several fronts: broadening public understanding and appreciation for these unique national treasures, expanding partnerships for

their care, and strengthening the stewardship and infrastructure of the 535 refuges and thousands of small prairie-wetlands making up the Refuge System.

The Centennial Act calls for the establishment of a Centennial Commission, a group of prominent citizens and Members of Congress who will guide the centennial celebrations and help to build support and awareness for the Refuge System. The Centennial Act also calls on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a long-term plan to address the highest priority operations, maintenance, and construction needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System by March 2002. With that, I will turn to a discussion of our operational and maintenance needs.

Refuge Maintenance

Our first priority is taking care of what we have: the maintenance of the facilities and equipment we need to accomplish our mission. The Refuge System has \$7 billion worth of buildings, utilities, dikes and levees, roads, fences, dams, vehicles and tools, that we must maintain to protect their value and keep them safe and in good working order.

Refuge maintenance is addressed in three different but related programs: Refuge Operations supports salaries for maintenance workers, laborers, and equipment operators; Construction supports large and complex maintenance and capital improvement projects that normally cannot be accomplished in 1 year; and the Refuge Maintenance program which supports annual maintenance, equipment repair and replacement, and deferred maintenance backlogged projects. In addition, since TEA-21, the Federal Lands Highways program funds help address additional maintenance projects.

Thanks to your support, the efforts of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), our Five Year Deferred Maintenance and Equipment Replacement list, and our Maintenance Management System data base, we have made progress addressing the highest priority needs of our facilities and equipment over the past few years. I'm pleased to say we have slowed the rate of growth in our maintenance backlog from 30 percent just a few years ago to 7 percent today. We currently estimate a backlog of deferred maintenance projects, that currently includes 8,092 projects, of roughly \$830 million, including \$172 million for equipment replacement and repair.

In Fiscal Year 2001, Congress appropriated a total of \$75 million for Refuge System maintenance (\$56 million in Title I and \$19 million in Title VIII) and we are receiving \$20 million annually in TEA-21 funds through the Federal Lands Highways program. Therefore, in total, we have \$95 million available for refuge maintenance during the current fiscal year, and with this level of funding we will make additional progress toward our ultimate goal of reducing the maintenance backlog.

Refuge Operations

Now I want to shift gears from maintenance and talk about refuge operations for a few moments. Refuge staff have identified, categorized and prioritized \$1.1 billion in refuge operational projects. Thinking about refuge operations requires a slightly different perspective than thinking about refuge maintenance. Refuge operations directly support the refuge staff and their activities to fulfill the mission of the refuge while refuge maintenance supports the facilities and equipment to ensure the mission of the refuge can be carried out efficiently and effectively. Refuge operational needs and opportunities, if implemented, will forward our mission in managing refuge lands. These needs and opportunities are entered into our Refuge Operating Needs System (RONS) as they are identified by refuge staff.

To better understand the most pressing operational needs on refuges, Congress directed us—in the Committee report accompanying the Fiscal Year 2000 Interior Appropriations bill—to develop a tiered approach to identify priority operating needs; aspects of refuge management staff, equipment, and supplies that are basic components of carrying out management of the Refuge System. We have responded to that Congressional direction and tiered the RONS data base and now have a comprehensive view of the most pressing operational needs of the Refuge System. For instance, many of our refuges do not have a full-time biologist or law enforcement officer or have the resources to support monitoring wildlife populations and habitat conditions. In some cases a full-time biologist or a law enforcement officer may not be necessary to fulfill the mission of a particular refuge; however, in many other cases, they are an essential part of the successful operation of a refuge. In addition to priority operating needs, there is a wealth of opportunity to do good things for wildlife within the Refuge System. These opportunities are included in the second tier of identified refuge operations projects.

Additionally, we have unmet needs associated with establishment of new refuges that are categorized in the RONS data base, in order to respond to GAO's report

entitled, Agency Needs to Inform Congress of Future Costs Associated with Land Acquisitions. That report recommended that the Service estimate future operations and maintenance costs for each new refuge.

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate your support in helping us meet our operating needs. Since 1997, funding for refuge operations has increased from \$155 million to \$225 million. Our people continue to do great work on the ground and to manage our refuges to provide tremendous benefits to wildlife and spectacular opportunities for Americans to get outdoors and enjoy their wildlife heritage. We are getting increasingly important work from a growing volunteer workforce. We are getting expanding support from our Refuge Friends groups and cooperating associations. We are growing our fee demonstration programs. In short, we are being innovative in meeting our needs, which I believe has always been a hallmark of refuge managers and the Refuge System.

The Refuge System has made substantial progress in identifying and categorizing its priority operation and maintenance needs and opportunities, an important step in developing a long-term plan for meeting those needs. In the coming months, the Service will present its findings to the Department of the Interior and OMB, and work toward developing a long-term plan to address these needs and opportunities.

Comprehensive Conservation Planning

I would like to discuss the status of our comprehensive conservation planning efforts in some detail. The planning process is premised on strong partnerships with State fish and wildlife agencies. It provides us with an opportunity to bring science to bear on managing refuges, assuring an ecological perspective to how refuges fit into the greater surrounding landscapes. The planning process also provides citizens with a meaningful role in helping to shape future management of individual refuges, recognizing the important roles refuges play in the lives of nearby communities.

Refuge comprehensive conservation plans are similar, in concept, to land use or general management plans developed by the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, and the National Park Service. These plans provide a long-term vision and serve as a foundation for sound, consistent, participatory refuge management. To date, we have worked with the States and local communities to complete 22 comprehensive conservation plans. Another 72 are underway. This year, we expect to complete 22. A total of 282 comprehensive conservation plans will ultimately need to be completed for the 535 existing units of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

We have made slow but good progress toward completing refuge comprehensive conservation plans by 2012 as required by the Refuge System Improvement Act. The initial plans are always most difficult and we found that on some refuges our planning efforts were complicated by limited staff, training, and shortcomings in good scientific background information. Additionally, we spent considerable time and effort developing our planning policy. We also have made efforts to address these shortcomings by training over 300 refuge staff in comprehensive conservation plan development to date. We believe we have laid a good framework for making better progress.

We have learned a great deal in our efforts to date. For example, in the comprehensive conservation planning for National Wildlife Refuges in western Tennessee, we are working jointly with State officials to plan for refuges and State managed areas concurrently. We are looking at how the refuges work together with areas managed by the State to protect wildlife throughout the region. This broad-based, ecological approach to planning can serve as a model for how we can look at the health and integrity of the landscape at differing scales that meet local needs. By planning in this manner, we involve partners, share resources and expenses, and develop a better product.

Just how large a role the Refuge System has come to play in the lives of Americans nationwide will soon be symbolized by the arrival of the centennial anniversary of Theodore Roosevelt's designation of Pelican Island as the first National Wildlife Refuge. This has prompted reflection and anticipation as well as providing a tremendous opportunity to raise public understanding and appreciation for the Refuge System. Together we can celebrate our first century of wildlife conservation by building a centennial legacy that fulfills the promises we have made for our second century.

Thank you for giving me this time to share my thoughts with you. I will be happy to respond to whatever questions you may have.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you, Mr. Ashe.
Next is Mr. Bill Horn. Welcome.

**STATEMENT OF WILLIAM HORN, ON BEHALF OF THE
WILDLIFE LEGISLATIVE FUND OF AMERICA**

Mr. HORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America, WLFA, I appreciate the opportunity to appear today regarding management of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and implementation of the 1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act.

My comments will focus primarily on policy issues relating to administration of the Refuge System and implementation of the 1997 Act. Refuge funding, which has been identified as a major issue since the mid-1980's, when, during my tenure at Interior, we established the Accelerated Refuge Maintenance Program in 1985 to try to get a grip on the backlog.

Fundamentally, one of the difficulties has been that the Refuge System has lacked the broad-based public constituency that the National Park Service has, and as a result, this spectacular system, which is of larger magnitude with more units and more diversity, seems, particularly within the Department, and to a lesser degree within Congress, to be treated as a sometimes forgotten stepchild. I think it is safe to say among the community of interests that supports the Refuge System, we hope that is something that can be corrected, and we are all working together to correct over time.

Obviously, in order to secure the type of public support which will translate into solid funding for addressing adequate maintenance and operation of the Refuge System, requires a strong partnership with the community of users. And anglers and hunters have essentially been that support group for the Refuge System since its inception, and have been strong supporters, both with their volunteer efforts and their dollars. However, I think it is safe to say that in the last few years, the sporting community has felt somewhat less than welcome, and felt that in some circumstances our support was not necessarily wanted. That needs to change, because having strong support from the hunting and fishing community, in our opinion, is very, important to the long-term health and benefit of this system.

Having said that, let me focus briefly on some of the policy concerns we have. They fall into three categories. One, that there are substantive concerns about policies that the Service is developing to guide implementation of the 1997 Act. Second is the role or, frankly, lack of appropriate role for state fish and wildlife agencies in the refuge planning process. Third, in our statement, we have identified some specific issues and specific units that we think are emblematic of some of the problems that we are facing.

It is our opinion that these types of issues and concerns do indeed erode support among the sporting community, and we think that erosion needs to be halted so we can all work together toward addressing some of these funding issues.

Let me cite one example of the concerns that we have got. One of the critical features of the 1997 Improvement Act was the identification of wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting and fishing as priority public uses. And, Congress, within the statute, expressly recognized the legitimacy of these traditional activities, and they established only one statutory caveat, that these activities

need to be compatible. Now, if found to be compatible the law and legislative history make it abundantly clear that these uses are to be facilitated.

Now, in contrast, our review of the proposed policies indicates a new threshold requirement is introduced that is found nowhere in the statute, and that is a precompatibility determination of appropriateness. This policy appears to spell out that an activity must be found appropriate before you even begin to address the statutory requirement of compatibility. Now, in conversations with Service personnel, including Mr. Ashe, we are assured that this is not the intent of the policies. We are glad that the Service recently extended the comment period, and we hope that we have an opportunity to work together with the Service and work with the Subcommittee to assure that issues like this are resolved in a manner completely consistent with the 1997 Act that was so carefully worked out among the parties at this table, and obviously, with Congress.

In addition to these substantive problems, we have identified some serious procedural difficulties, most notably, that individual state fish and wildlife agencies are not being accorded an appropriate substantive role in refuge planning. Many of the agencies believe that the process is really akin to lip service. There are a lot of meetings, there is a lot of listening, there is a lot of nodding of heads, but it never produces any substantive results. We would hope that as the planning procedures go ahead, that the Service will take Secretary Norton at her word, and put greater emphasis on the necessity for partnership with the state agencies. They have primacy over resident fish and wildlife. They are not an ordinary interest group like all the rest of us here at this table, and I think that the Service should accord them appropriate status.

I will be glad to answer any questions, and thank you again for the opportunity to appear this morning.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Horn follows:]

Statement of William P. Horn, on behalf of The Wildlife Legislative Fund of America (WLFA)

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America (WLFA), I appreciate the opportunity to testify today regarding management of the National Wildlife Refuge System and implementation of the 1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (NWRISA). WLFA was organized in 1977 for the purpose of protecting the American heritage to hunt, fish, and trap and supporting scientific wildlife management. It pursues these objectives at the Federal, state, and local level on behalf of its over 1.5 million members and affiliates.

WLFA was deeply involved in the enactment of NWRISA. We worked closely with Rep. Don Young during the introduction in 1995 of the bill that ultimately became the Refuge Improvement Act. WLFA strongly supported that measure and subsequent related bills, we participated in the negotiations that yielded the bill passed by Congress, and were pleased to be present in the Oval Office when the Act was signed by the President. Since then, we have closely monitored implementation activities by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Department of the Interior providing substantive comments and opinions regarding the letter and spirit of the Act.

We appreciate that FWS has a major task in preparing the Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP s) required for each unit or complex of the System. In general, the CCP process has moved ahead in a timely manner and we commend FWS for not getting caught behind the eight ball in keeping up with the planning schedule.

WLFA does, however, have significant concerns regarding (1) substantive policies developed by FWS to guide implementation of the Act, (2) the role of State fish and wildlife agencies in the planning process, and (3) specific issues at specific units

where Refuge unit purposes or legitimate uses are being sidetracked. These concerns are outlined in detail below.

Substantive Policies

FWS invested considerable time and effort in preparing a series of policies to guide implementation of NWRSIA. These include policies on (1) biological integrity, (2) mission and goals, (3) recreation, (4) appropriate uses, and (5) wilderness. Of these, only biological integrity has been completed in addition to others addressing compatibility and planning. WLFA has serious substantive objections to the five enumerated policies. In each case, we are persuaded that the policies do not adhere to the letter or spirit of the 1997 Act and require Refuge managers to make findings or other threshold determinations not found within the statute or contemplated by the drafters of the Act.

The policy on biological integrity is a prime example. Wildlife conservation is the preeminent purpose of the Refuge System and this is spelled out clearly in the Act. This objective is codified in the mission that applies to all units and is part of the specific purposes that similarly affect each Refuge. The term biological integrity is used once in the statute as part of 13 subparagraphs instructing how the system is to be managed. This policy has the apparent effect of elevating this one Congressional prescription among many to a preeminent position. Indeed, the policy at paragraph 3.3 specifies that this policy is an additional directive for refuge managers to follow while complying with refuge purposes and mission.

The policy, adopted in final form last year, also equates biological integrity with either natural or historic conditions defined to mean those conditions that pre-date significant human impact on the landscape. It even sends Refuge managers on archaeological missions to try to determine what those historic or natural conditions might have been (see 3.13). This backward looking policy is not what Congress intended and is not needed for FWS to assure conservation of wildlife resources. One of WLFA's concerns is that many refuge units have been established to benefit particular species of wildlife (e.g., bighorn sheep, moose) or categories of wildlife (e.g., waterfowl). Management to optimize habitat for such species may create conditions that are not natural or historic and run afoul of this additional requirement not part of the law.

A major achievement of NWRSIA was the identification of wildlife-dependent recreation including hunting and fishing as priority public uses of refuges. Congress expressly recognized the legitimacy of these traditional activities on refuge lands and established exactly one caveat: these activities need to be compatible. If found to be compatible, the law and legislative history make it abundantly clear that these uses are to be facilitated on refuges.

In stark contrast, the proposed policy on uses introduces a brand new threshold requirement found nowhere in the statute: appropriateness. The policy spells out that an activity, including any of the priority public uses, must be found to be appropriate BEFORE the issue of compatibility will even be examined. We defy anyone to find this additional requirement in the 1997 Act. Congress already determined the appropriateness of wildlife-dependent recreation and this finding, which exists as a matter of law, must be countermanded at the discretion of individual refuge managers.

Other extra-statutory requirements are found in the pending recreation policy. This policy includes a directive that refuge managers must ensure (i.e., guarantee) that adequate financial resources are or will be available before authorizing hunting or fishing programs. This very issue arose in 1993 when a number of hunting and fishing programs were slated for closure on the grounds that inadequate funding was available. Congress specifically countermanded that administrative action and NWRSIA specifically amended prior provisions of law to eliminate the necessity of making findings of budget or financial adequacy as a precondition of authorizing hunting or fishing. WLFA is astounded that the draft policy tries to resurrect this condition in the face of express Congressional action not once but twice!

The proposed wilderness policy suffers similar flaws. Rather than providing clear objective direction to refuge managers on how to accommodate Wilderness Act provisions and wildlife conservation objectives, it is a subjective paen to "wilderness values." It tells managers that they are to maintain wilderness character by refocusing our perception of nature and our relationship to it. (2.5.B). Furthermore, it puts the intangible values of wilderness on a par with the biophysical features of refuge units. And it too emphasizes naturalness as measured by the conditions of pre-European contact. (7.10.A). In essence, the default management position becomes leave everything alone even if specific refuge purposes encourage management for the benefit of particular species of wildlife.

WLFA intends to comment aggressively on these policies. We hope that Congress will exercise its oversight authority to ensure that these policies are fully consistent with the letter and spirit of NWRSA.

Procedural Issues

Besides these substantive policy problems, there are serious procedural problems too. Most notably, individual state fish and wildlife agencies are not being accorded an appropriate substantive role in refuge planning. To the contrary, the state agencies, notwithstanding their primacy over management of resident fish and wildlife, are being treated like every other ordinary interest group. A term heard repeatedly from state agency personnel is lip service. FWS meets and consults with its state counterparts without any substantive results or consequences. FWS listens politely and proceeds to go its own way regardless of what it hears from the states. WLFA is persuaded that the relationship between FWS and the state agencies is the worst it has ever been. This unfortunate legacy of the previous administration must be changed by the new leadership at Interior.

Specific Issues

We could provide the subcommittee numerous on-the-ground examples of the substantive and procedural problems afflicting refuge planning and management. Rather than offer a litany of specific matters, we have taken the liberty of enclosing two documents that are emblematic of the problems. The first is correspondence to FWS from WLFA and the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society regarding management planning at the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. The issue there is active management to enhance the desert bighorn sheep populations (the reason the unit was created) and limitations on management arising from Wilderness designations and wilderness management policy. The second are a series of letters from the Ohio Division of Wildlife to FWS regarding management of the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge. This correspondence paints a picture of frustration, substantive and procedural, about the planning for this one particular unit. It is safe to say that this frustration is being replicated throughout the country.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear today. WLFA looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that FWS adheres to the letter and spirit of the 1997 Act, substantively and procedurally, in administering the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you, Mr. Horn.
Dr. Beard, National Audubon Society.

**STATEMENT OF DANIEL P. BEARD, CHIEF OPERATING
OFFICER, NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY**

Dr. BEARD. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I would like to begin by requesting that my testimony and a report entitled "Refuges in Crisis" be made part of the record.

Mr. GILCHREST. Without objection, so ordered.

[The aforementioned report has been retained in the Committee's official files.]

Dr. BEARD. Mr. Chairman, I came here last year, and used an analogy to try to describe why we felt that the problems of the National Wildlife Refuge System deserved attention. And what I said at that time was that the centennial legislation was a little like sending a bouquet of roses to a patient in an emergency room. It made the patient feel better, but it didn't do much to solve the problem.

Well, we are here a year later, nine months later anyway, and we still have the same set of problems. In the meantime we produced a report, which I have entitled "Refuges in Crisis", trying to outline the nature of the problems that face a representative sample of refuges throughout the country.

We are not just interested in pointing out problems. We are interested in solutions. And it seems to us the solutions are twofold. First is the need for more money to address funding the O&M backlog. We have joined with all the other groups here as a participant in the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement, to try to secure that funding. We have worked with many in Congress, including members of this Subcommittee, who have been very gracious and very supportive. But money isn't the only answer in our view.

The second solution is to address the problem of what we call institutional neglect. Mr. Horn said it well. The refuge system simply isn't a priority. I think his words were, it is a stepchild, a poor stepchild in the Department and with the Service. I think I would use a different analogy, Mr. Chairman, and it has to do with my employer, of course. I would call the system an ugly duckling which we want to make into a swan. And given the massive problems that the Refuge System faces, the only solution we see is to pass legislation or use executive authority to establish a separate National Wildlife Refuge Service, to take the Refuge System out of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and to have a separate system.

Now, many people at this table don't agree with that solution, and that is fair enough. But I guess our point is, what is their solution? We are ready to talk about any solution with anybody at any time. But rather than be accused of crying wolf on this issue, I would suggest that you don't take our word for the severity of the crisis.

Mr. Chairman, I would encourage you to invite Secretary Norton to accompany you on a tour of refuges, to examine the problems they face, hold field hearings or simply talk to refuge managers, or friends, or supporters, to find out what is taking place in the field. Ask refuge managers whether they think there is a crisis. Ask them what they think needs to be done.

It is always easy to sit in Washington, and assume that everything outside the Beltway is okay. In our view, it isn't. We have surveyed our members, friends of refuges, refuge managers, and based on all those inquiries, the answer comes back, this is a system that needs help. It needs immediate help.

Mr. Ashe pointed out something very interesting. There are over 200 friends' groups. The National Audubon Society has formed more than 80 of those over the last four years. It is something that we have worked very hard at. In addition to that, there are over 30,000 volunteers that work at the Refuge System. These people are giving their most valuable commodity, their free time, and free labor, to help our National Wildlife Refuge System. They care. They know there are problems. They know they are needed, and they are doing that.

In addition to that, we have been working, over the last year, to help build that support among friends. Several weeks ago, Mr. Chairman, 60 people met on a Saturday morning at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. You weren't able to be with us. Sixty people took the time from their busy schedules to come out and learn about the problems of the refuge. What is it they could do to help. They have been contributing time and energy and effort, writing

letters to Congress, meeting with Members of Congress and others to try to urge support.

We had to turn away people at Cape Romaine in South Carolina two weeks ago. We had 120 people and we had to put them in a room that could only hold 80, and the fire marshal made 40 people leave.

We have had over 50 people at the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge in LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

Pelican Island was also two weeks ago. And we are holding another organizing session and training session this weekend at San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

It is our hope that within the next few months, we will be holding organizing sessions and training sessions to try to help people become involved in the process every two weeks, to be able to build out support.

So, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today, and to once again highlight the problems of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Beard follows:]

**Statement of Daniel P. Beard, Chief Operating Officer,
National Audubon Society**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of National Audubon Society's one million members and supporters throughout the Americas, I am pleased to be here today to discuss the needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System. With 530 refuges spanning all 50 states and U.S. territories, and a total acreage comparable to the state of Montana, the Refuge System is the world's largest system of lands dedicated first and foremost to wildlife conservation. The Refuge System has great potential to be the world's model of wildlife conservation while providing a host of world-class opportunities for compatible wildlife-related recreation such as bird watching, hunting and fishing. As one of the founding members of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), Audubon has worked to ensure this potential is fulfilled through increased appropriations for refuge operations and maintenance needs. Working with members of this subcommittee and others, these efforts have met with success. We are pleased that the Congress has approved increases averaging \$30 million per year over the past four years.

Unfortunately, the increases in funding have not been fast enough to prevent serious problems from arising. As we indicated in our recent report, the National Wildlife Refuge System is a system in crisis.

Numerous threats, such as incompatible uses, the spread of invasive species, declining water quality, and increasing rates of habitat loss, are harming birds and wildlife on refuges across the country.

There are two reasons for this state of affairs. First, the long-standing backlog of critical operations and maintenance needs is an underlying cause of the crisis. Second, there is a serious problem of institutional neglect within the Interior Department toward the Refuge System. I'd like to discuss each of these issues.

The Longstanding Backlog of Critical Operations and Maintenance Needs

First, despite some successes, the Fish and Wildlife Service generally lacks the fundamental capacity with which to adequately address these serious threats to our nation's resources. With its 94 million acres, 5,000 buildings, 6,500 miles of roads, 2,700 miles of dikes, thousands of water control structures, 34 million visitors and 2,000 species of birds and wildlife, the Refuge System has a massive set of needs that expands each year. These needs include both 1) a maintenance component, which addresses the System's deteriorating infrastructure and provides basic visitor services such as signs and trails; and 2) an operations component, which provides refuges with the tools they need to provide adequate services to the public and conserve wildlife. The operations component includes staffing for scientific studies and comprehensive plans, projects for recovering endangered species and controlling invasive species, and efforts to monitor wildlife and restore habitat.

The operations and maintenance backlog facing the Refuge System is nearly \$2 billion and growing, though recent congressional attention has caused the rate of

growth to slow considerably. Currently, maintenance needs exceed \$830 million and operational needs total \$1.13 billion. As a result of recent congressional oversight, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has made an effort to prioritize these needs. In the highest priority tier of their two-tiered system, FWS has identified \$344 million in operational needs. These needs are categorized as: 1) essential staffing, 2) mission-critical projects, and 3) new and significantly expanded refuges.

Critical Operational Needs

To illustrate these high-priority needs, let us turn to the Fish and Wildlife Service's mission-critical projects to control invasive species harmful nonnative plants, animals and microorganisms. The Fish and Wildlife Service has identified \$30 million in Tier 1 operational needs to address invasive species threats to wildlife habitat on refuges. These needs are increasing rapidly as the problem, and awareness of the problem, grows. In 1999, the Refuge Operating Needs System data base included funding needs of \$44 million for invasive species management. By July of 2000, that number had increased by nearly 300 percent to \$120 million.

Invasive species are like a wildfire out of control. Each year in America, invasive species damage and destroy more than 3 million acres of natural habitat. The Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that 6 million acres of refuge land are damaged and destroyed just by invasive plant species alone. As you know, Mr. Chairman, invasive animal species are just as destructive. On Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Maryland, invasive nutria have destroyed 7,000 of the 17,000 acres of marsh, and the refuge continues to lose between 500 and 1,000 acres per year. On Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, invasive zebra mussels are killing native mollusks while invasive plants are wiping out wetlands needed by the refuge's waterfowl population.

Invasive species affect hundreds of refuges across the country. This is a crisis of epidemic proportions, and we hope the subcommittee will turn its full attention to addressing it.

A quick glance at the operational and maintenance needs of Blackwater Refuge illustrates the need to address the crisis and the backlog. Since 1989, Blackwater NWR has increased in acreage by more than 80 percent. Exotic and invasive species, human population growth, and other factors threaten the very existence of the refuge's wetlands and wildlands. Mandated to protect, conserve, and manage endangered species and migratory birds, Blackwater's intricate and intensive management and monitoring programs require a strong biological program. Biologists are needed to help develop a control strategy for the invasive nutria. Funding is needed for marsh restoration. Opportunities exist to improve wildlife observation and environmental education, implement MoistSoil management for shorebirds, and provide more food for migratory birds by improving water management capabilities. None of these improvements can occur if the operations and maintenance backlog is not addressed.

Need for Improved Science

The impact of the operations and maintenance backlog is also seen in the Fish and Wildlife Service's need for improved science to support management decisions and comprehensive conservation planning. The Fish and Wildlife Service has been working to move toward an ecosystem approach, yet the Service lacks basic staffing and other resources to support efforts to implement ecosystem management.

In order to properly manage refuges, refuge managers must first understand the ecosystems within which their refuges are situated. To understand these systems, managers must identify the structures, components, processes, and linkages among ecosystems; identify current ecological trends and conditions; identify minimum ecological conditions necessary to maintain or restore ecosystems; and identify effects of human activities on ecological conditions.

Little of this information is available to most refuge managers. A survey of refuge managers in the early 1990's found that only 60 percent of refuges have inventories of bird populations, and for other groups of species the numbers are less than 30 percent. Without knowledge of the condition, trends, and responses to management of biological systems, refuge managers will struggle to develop and implement management plans in a proper manner.

By extension, without this baseline scientific information, the Fish and Wildlife Service will not be able to complete plans that meet the data needs outlined in their planning policy issued May 25, 2000 pursuant to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. In this policy, managers are directed to identify and describe the structures, components, and functions of the ecosystem(s) of which the planning unit is a part. Although the policy allows that a lack of data should not delay the completion of the plan, a lack of data will compromise the quality of the

plan and its likelihood that it will effectively serve its primary purpose of conserving refuge resources.

Need for Better Planning

Since the passage of the Refuge Improvement Act in 1997, the Fish and Wildlife Service has completed 22 Comprehensive Conservation Plans. At current funding levels, the Service will not complete a plan for each refuge in time to meet its statutory deadline of 2012. The process is demanding of limited refuge staff. They must compile and analyze background information, plan and conduct public meetings, synthesize input from various government agencies and the public, and develop and analyze alternatives and draft plans. Lacking adequate funding and staff, refuges often do not have the resources to develop quality plans within acceptable timeframes. Further, they are often diverted from other critical duties.

The Tier 1 operational priorities prepared by the Fish and Wildlife Service include mission-critical projects to improve science and develop comprehensive plans. Improved science would not only improve the quality of the plans but would improve nearly all conservation-related aspects of refuge operations, from endangered species recovery to restoration of habitat.

Need for Essential Staffing

To improve science and planning, the Refuge System will need the essential staffing necessary to manage its lands effectively. The Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that 1350 Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) are needed immediately if the Refuge System can meet its basic responsibilities and its core mission. This includes 388 biologists, 163 managers, and 114 resource specialists who will vastly improve the capacity of the Fish and Wildlife Service to produce high-quality conservation plans and otherwise conserve and protect refuges across the country.

At Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge in Massachusetts, for example, minimal staff and resources have been assigned to manage a significant biological resource. Two staff members, a manager and a biologist, are responsible for the refuge's maintenance, law enforcement, research, monitoring, public outreach and educational programs. This refuge contains 2,750 acres of sand dunes, freshwater ponds, and marshes that provide one of the few secure nesting and staging areas for migratory shorebirds in the state. To adequately protect the resource, the Fish and Wildlife Service has concluded the refuge needs a core staff of six FTEs, including biologists, public outreach specialists, and law enforcement personnel. At current staff and funding levels, the refuge is forced to operate hand-to-mouth, buildings are dilapidated, and the resource is left at risk.

For Monomoy NWR, Blackwater NWR, and hundreds of other refuges that face imminent threats and struggle every day to accomplish their basic mission, increased funding will help to address the problems these areas face. Funding can put more and better scientists doing more and better science out on refuges, it can improve the system's dilapidated infrastructure, and it can provide basic services to refuge visitors like maps, brochures and trails. It can improve every facet of refuge operations and significantly improve our nation's efforts to conserve birds and wildlife.

Money is Not the Only Problem

The second major problem facing the Refuge System is equally challenging. If money were the only problem facing the system, it would be a simple matter to work with the appropriations committee to secure the funds. But money is not the only problem.

The Refuge System is still largely invisible to the average American and lacks consistent and focused attention from its leadership. The Fish and Wildlife Service faces difficult organizational challenges, including both the need to move toward an ecosystem approach and the need to reconcile many disparate and competing priorities. As you know, Mr. Chairman, Audubon supports elevating the Refuge System to coequal status with its sister land systems such as the National Park System.

The Department of the Interior, and especially the Secretary, needs to be an advocate for our Refuge System. The Department needs to resolve jurisdictional disputes over harmful public uses and to better manage ecological areas that transcend jurisdictional boundaries. The Army Corps of Engineers must also be investigated, to ensure that its processes do not lead to the destruction of valuable national assets in the Refuge System.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the operations and maintenance backlog facing the Refuge System presents a profound challenge to the Fish and Wildlife Service as they attempt to manage the Refuge System under the Improvement Act of 1997. Efforts to improve science, complete adequate plans, provide basic services to the public, and protect birds and wildlife and their habitat are jeopardized by a lack of es-

sential staffing and funding for mission-critical projects. We hope you and the members of this subcommittee will work to ensure that these critical needs are addressed.

But money is not the only problem. We hope this subcommittee will continue to attack the crisis in the Refuge System by investigating the issues of institutional neglect, jurisdictional conflicts with other government agencies, and the impacts of the Army Corps of Engineers on refuge resources.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I will be pleased to answer any questions that you or Members of the Subcommittee may have.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you, Dr. Beard.
Dr. Sparrowe, welcome, sir.

**STATEMENT OF ROLLIN D. SPARROWE, PRESIDENT,
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE**

Dr. SPARROWE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to be here again to testify before this Committee on refuge affairs. We at the Wildlife Management Institute continue to work with the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement on operational and maintenance needs of the system, but also have spent considerable staff time at our institute, interacting with the Fish and Wildlife Service on the whole spectrum of refuge issues, the planning process, the maintenance and operational needs, and the ongoing policy development process.

As you will recall, the unifying interest of the now 19-member CARE group is in securing adequate operation and maintenance funding for the Refuge System. The simple premise is that no one's needs are met, nor are the needs of wildlife and fish met, unless managers have the money and the staff to do the management necessary on refuges, to make them fulfill their purpose.

With your help and others on the Committee, this very bipartisan movement on behalf of refuges has in fact elevated its stature and its visibility, in the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of the Interior, the Congress, and with the general public. A lot of this has been based on careful documentation of needs and careful documentation of what the Fish and Wildlife Service has done with the new money provided it. I won't go into the details because we have attached some material to our testimony to illustrate that. The Cooperative Alliance is in the process of updating a plan for the Refuge System, entitled Restoring America's Wildlife Legacy. And we will be sending that when it is completed. It will be a cooperative effort with many of the folks sitting at this table.

It is important to recognize the backlog needs on refuges are more than just maintenance. Maintenance is generally more easily understood—buildings, roads, water facilities and things like that. But the primary need for operational support is one that we and other members of the Alliance have tried to foster, and we think it continues to need attention. Staff and money to carry out programs is a pressing need that you will hear from every refuge manager in the field.

Some examples. Yesterday I was on the National Elk Refuge in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and spoke with Barry Reiswig, the manager, about the fact that here is a refuge with all of the complexities, and probably some more, of modern refuges: 900,000 visitors, problems with law enforcement and no staff to carry it out, having

to divert management people from the refuge for collateral duty to deal with sometimes even dangerous interactions on drugs and all of the other things that our complex society now brings to the door of even a very wild refuge area; dealing with the major tasks of raising food for 500 bison and 6,000 elk and things like this without the staff to carry it out.

And yet, what Barry told me in response to direct questions was the same thing I heard the week before from Al Trout at Bear River National Wildlife Refuge, and two weeks ago from a whole gathering of regional supervisors of the refuge program. Money is getting to the field. One of the things the refuge managers have said is that "we have been able to satisfy many of our maintenance needs." One of the best things about it is they now have some maintenance money every year to use to chip away—

Mr. GILCREST. Excuse me, Dr. Sparrowe, you are saying money is getting—

Dr. SPARROWE. Is getting to the refuge managers in the field from the increases from recent years and all of this activity. It has not met all their needs.

What I want to emphasize, the refuge managers are feeling the results of all the work and the attention that they have been getting both from the Service and all of the partners outside and the Congress in providing additional money. So what we have done so far together has been very beneficial to refuge managers. They see hope now for the future.

But they went on to illustrate that they have needs to conduct monitoring of those resources to carry out public use programs and to deal with the increasing complexities of their refuge tasks. And I think documentation has been provided by the Service about the size of the need for staffing and their ability to carry out refuge management.

I also want to point out that in our new assessment of restoring the Refuge System, probably operations will be three or four times as important in terms of dollar figures expressed for the future than will maintenance. Not that maintenance isn't a continuing important need, but we really feel a need to focus on the operational side of it. We have interacted with the planning process, both the comprehensive plans on each individual refuge with—not all of them, but maybe half so far through my field staff, and also with the major policies being written by the Service. And let us just add to that part of this discussion by saying that we had some concerns about a recent policy on ecological integrity. We waded in, provided extensive comment, as did others, met with the Service, and found them very responsive. We think the policy has come a long way, and we look forward to continuing to work with them.

In closing, I see a good deal of hope for the Refuge System, and in fact the Centennial Act and the commission to be formed and the potential for this Committee and its members and all of the folks that we have worked with through this Alliance and others, to make a big step by the 100th anniversary of the Refuge System. This is something we are looking forward to and think should receive a lot of attention.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sparrowe follows:]

**Statement of Dr. Rollin D. Sparrowe, President,
Wildlife Management Institute**

Mr. Chairman. The Wildlife Management Institute is pleased to be before this Committee again to discuss the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). We, and others, are working to continue to elevate the NWRS in the public dialogue, especially with a new Administration in place. We have been before this Committee several times in recent years, concerning organic legislation for refuges, operation and maintenance needs, cooperative efforts by private organizations to enhance refuges and volunteer support for refuges. Most recently, we appeared to support the National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Act that originated with this Subcommittee in the last Congress. We congratulate you on the successful passage of that legislation.

We continue to work with the Cooperative Alliance for Refuges Enhancement (CARE) on operational and maintenance needs of the Refuge System, and we have spent considerable staff time interacting with the Fish and Wildlife Service on the full spectrum of refuge issues, including understanding the Maintenance Management System (MMS), the Refuge Operating Needs System (RONS), the Comprehensive Conservation Planning (CCP) process and the ongoing policy development process. We commend you and this Committee for the continuing attention to this important, bipartisan movement to improve the management of national wildlife refuges for fish, wildlife and the people of America.

As you will recall, the unifying interest of the now 19 member CARE Group is in securing adequate operation and maintenance funding for the Refuge System. This simple premise is predicated on the fact that refuge managers cannot provide for the needs of wildlife or people without the staff and money to conduct necessary monitoring, active management of biological resources and habitats, or provide for public use programs as called for under the 1997 Refuge Improvement Act. This Act clearly states that refuges are primarily for wildlife and that other uses, including priority public uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife, photography, environmental education and interpretation are dependent upon having healthy wildlife. Additional resources are clearly needed to take advantage of the opportunities to enhance wildlife populations and public uses of refuges.

With the help of this and other committees in the Congress, the past Administration and supporters of the Refuge System, more of our national wildlife refuges are operating closer to their full potential. This has happened as the result of bipartisan support from Congress to provide funding through the regular appropriations process as well as supplemental funding through the Transportation Enhancement Act. This collective support rests on careful documentation of the needs and enhanced accountability for the use of new money by the Fish and Wildlife Service. To satisfy the commitment of CARE members to strong fiscal accountability, as well as provide an additional perspective to the Service, CARE has conducted an analysis of the use of new funds. We have attached, as part of this testimony, the latest available report on the use of these funds by the Service to reduce the refuge maintenance and operations backlog. Another such analysis will be conducted within the next few months and will be sent to your Committee as a follow-up item. In addition, CARE is in the process of updating our plan for the Refuge System and entitled Restoring American's Wildlife Legacy and will send it to you as well. As aside, I would like to commend the Service for their full cooperation during these analyses. CARE has asked some tough questions, and the Service has responded in a very business like manner.

It is important to recognize that the backlog of needs on national wildlife refuges includes more than maintenance. Maintenance is generally more easily understood because it consists of buildings, water control devices, roads, other physical facilities and structures of a refuge. The Service has been closely working with other agencies within the Department of the Interior to standardize terms and schedules for maintenance items. We have made significant progress in meeting these needs.

However, we have made much less progress in securing funding for operational needs. Operational needs are, generally, less tangible and include a staff and money to conduct monitoring, biological investigations, public use surveys, educational programs and the myriad of things that go into maintaining and enhancing the fish and wildlife resources so that it can be made available to people in the most appropriate way. Many operating needs cannot be expressed in a single year or two of funding, but remain an ongoing costs as part of the business of running the refuge.

Congress, and others, have requested that the Service review their operating needs in detail. The Service has responded and developed an Essential Staffing Vacancies report that clearly identifies the staff needs on a refuge-by-refuge basis. The Service has also re-evaluated its Refuge Operational Needs System (RONS) and its

ranking priorities, so the highest priority projects are clearly identified. In developing these priorities, the Service has organized the operating needs of in the RONS data base into two-tiers.

The top tier (Tier 1) contains the highest priority needs of the Refuge System, as called for by the Appropriations Committee, for essential staffing vacancies, critical mission projects and new and significantly expanded refuges. The essential staffing vacancies report listed 1350 vacancies that are crucial to baseline management of National Wildlife Refuges. The high priority critical mission projects are essential to the Refuge System to meet the first mandate of the Refuge Improvement Act. The projects include biological monitoring and surveys, habitat management, public use opportunities and other projects that allow the System to meet its mission to the American people.

As an example, of the types of Tier 1" needs, identified, the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Maryland lists the following projects: (1) control of invading exotic species, (2) enhancement of the volunteer program, (3) development of the new visitor center exhibits, (4) restoration for and protection of Smith Island, (5) employment of a full-time, law enforcement officer, and (6) funding for several additional biological and public use projects on the refuge. We urge this Committee to understand the operating needs question so these needs may be communicated more clearly to future appropriators.

The Comprehensive Conservation Planning (CCP) process for the National Wildlife Refuge System has drawn considerable interest during their development. Currently, 22 CCPs have been completed, and 72 are underway. However, approximately 200 remain to be started. Each of these plans is extremely labor intensive and we have concerns that the current level of funding will not allow their completion by 2012, as required by the Refuge Improvement Act. WMI staff has reviewed and commented on individual policies and have interacted with refuge managers on CCPs in virtually all areas of the country. Attached, is an example of the types of comments we have provided on an individual CCP. While we fully support this planning process, we have additional concerns about the Services financial ability to implement them once they are completed.

In addition to the CCP process, there also has been the development and distribution for public comment on an array of operating policies for the national wildlife refuge system. These new policies, when finalized, are designed to implement the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 and aid refuge managers in providing consistent management of refuge programs. A recent policy circulated by the Service considered ecological integrity on the national wildlife refuge system. This policy attempted to define terms that were included in the Refuge Improvement Act, but have not previously been defined, and which the wildlife profession has had difficulty grappling with for many years. The response to this policy was widespread, partly because of the newness of the process, but mostly because the first draft seemed to be considerably off the mark. To its credit, the Service listened carefully to a wide array of comments and made significant changes before they finalized this policy.

Additional policies are in the process of being developed, commented on and finalized. While we fully support the development of these policies we strongly believe they must be done carefully, with full public input. Where we have encountered problems with CCPs, it has been clear that some refuge managers might have benefited from firm internal policies rather than being left to make their own interpretations. We still see some individual and regional differences in the approach to certain issues concerning public use. To avoid inadvertently setting new standards for program conduct, these policies must clearly reflect: (1) the purposes of individual refuges, (2) the mission of the system, or (3) common sense in avoiding making problems where none exist. If the Service's responsiveness in revising the Ecological Integrity policy is any indication, we are confident that the Service is motivated by a desire to provide its refuge managers clear consistent guidance to fully implement the Refuge Improvement Act and is open to suggestions from the public.

I want to thank this Committee for holding this hearing. To me it is further evidence that the needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System are indeed real, well documented, widely supported and beginning to get the attention that they rightfully deserve.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you very much, Dr. Sparrowe.
Mr. Bohlen, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF CURTIS BOHLEN, CHAIRMAN,
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE ASSOCIATION**

Mr. BOHLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GILCHREST. Did you drive across the bridge this morning?

Mr. BOHLEN. No, I didn't, that is where I am going tomorrow.

Mr. GILCHREST. That is good.

Mr. BOHLEN. First, on behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge Association, I would like to thank all the members of this Subcommittee for their leadership in highlighting the importance of the National Wildlife Refuge System, for redefining its mission, and for helping to alleviate this historic shortage of funds for management of our refuges.

As you well know, the Refuge System was grossly neglected for many years, and I hasten to add that the hardworking men and women who dedicate their lives to the management of these lands have not been a cause of this neglect. Rather, it has been a chronic shortage of financial resources that has left us with a system that is unable to achieve its full potential. We hope through the work of this Subcommittee that this deficiency can be corrected.

The Fish and Wildlife Service, as you know, was the first agency in the Department of the Interior to systematically document and catalog the needs of its land. They painstakingly developed the Maintenance Management System, known as MMS, and the Refuge Operating Needs System, known as RONS. The MMS database has identified a backlog of maintenance needs that exceeds \$830 million. While that is a large number, it is a manageable number. In fact, we are pleased to report, much as Dr. Sparrowe has, that with the help of Congress, significant inroads have been made in addressing basic maintenance projects within the system.

However, the crisis that this system is facing is far from over. Let us set a goal to eliminate this maintenance backlog by the time of the centennial.

Unfortunately, the picture for the operational needs of the system is not as rosy. The RONS database has identified needs in excess of \$1.2 billion. This number represents the opportunities that a fully functional system could take advantage of. Both Congress and CARE have worked with the Service to further screen and prioritize these identified needs into what is now called Tier 1 of the RONS database. Even with this screening process, Tier 1 has identified high-priority projects that require an additional \$355 million annually.

The type of projects contained in Tier 1 are those that begin to implement the Refuge Improvement Act. These projects include inventorying and monitoring biological resources, enhancing priority wildlife-dependent public usage, controlling invasive exotic species, and preparing Comprehensive Conservation Plans. All of these projects require not only funding, but also an increase of staff to get them done. Unlike maintenance, operational projects are, for the most part, people. Downsizing the Federal Government and implementing the Refuge Improvement Act are clearly in conflict. At this point, further progress in reducing the maintenance backlog and conducting adequate operations requires more staff. The current staff is spread so thin, that adding responsibilities is not a viable option.

At present, about 280 refuges, or 53 percent, do not have full-time staff, and less than 15 percent of refuge visitors have an opportunity to interact with the refuge staff. It is important to note that most of the staff that visitors contact are actually volunteers. Others have already stressed how important the volunteers are.

We are very grateful to the Committee for the Refuge Improvement Act, and particularly for the part that focuses on Comprehensive Conservation Plans. I see my time is up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bohlen follows:]

**Statement of Curtis (Buff) Bohlen, Chairman,
National Wildlife Refuge Association**

Mr. Chairman, The National Wildlife Refuge Association is grateful for this opportunity to discuss the financial needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System. We greatly appreciate the leadership shown by you and this Committee in addressing this important issue.

Our Association is the only national membership organization dedicated solely to protecting and perpetuating the National Wildlife Refuge System. Our mission is to preserve and enhance the integrity of that System as the nation's most important network of diverse and strategically located habitats set aside for the benefit of fish, wildlife, and plants. To this end we are constantly seeking ways to strengthen the System, whether it be reviewing and commenting on refuge management policies, facilitating discussion among interested parties or helping to reduce the funding backlog for operations and maintenance.

Currently, there are 538 national wildlife refuges comprising more than 93 million acres. These lands are the only Federal lands dedicated, as their primary purpose, to the conservation of wildlife. They are located in every state of the nation.

Unfortunately, the Refuge System was grossly neglected for many years. I hasten to add that the hardworking men and women who dedicate their lives to the management of these lands have not been a cause of this neglect. Rather, it has been a chronic shortage of financial resources that has left us with a system that is unable to achieve its full potential. We hope, through the work of this Committee that this deficiency will be corrected.

The needs of the System are well documented, but, unfortunately, may not be well known. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (was the first agency in the Department of the Interior (DOI) to systematically document and catalog the needs of its lands. They painstakingly developed the Maintenance Management System (MMS) and the Refuge Operating Needs System (RONS). These systems became the model for other DOI agencies to follow. DOI has now improved these systems and the Service is working with other agencies to harmonize definitions and the tracking process used to identify unmet needs.

Since its initial development, the MMS data base has identified a backlog of maintenance needs that exceeds a cost of \$830 million. While that is a large number, it is a manageable number. In fact, we are pleased to report that, with the help of Congress, significant inroads have been made in addressing basic maintenance projects within the System. However, while progress is being made, the crisis that the System is facing is far from over. Let us set a goal to eliminate this backlog by the time of the Centennial.

Unfortunately, the picture for the operational needs of the System is not as rosy. I will discuss these in a moment. Suffice it to say, significant additional resources will be required.

The National Wildlife Refuge Association is a member of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE). This group of 19 organizations joined together for the common goal of obtaining additional resources for the Refuge System. CARE spent considerable time and energy examining the MMS and RONS data bases and developed a long term plan to address those needs. A copy of this plan, entitled, Restoring America's Wildlife Legacy, is attached. CARE's goal is to have a fully functional refuge system by the 100th Anniversary in 2003. It is important to note that our definition of a fully functional refuge system is modest in light of the documented needs. Even with this modest definition and without the added responsibility given to the System by the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, we believe that the System needs an increase in its appropriation of at least \$200 million annually to meet this goal. CARE is presently updating its plan to include the costs of fully

implementing the extensive planning processes prescribed in the Act. The revised figures will be available soon.

As I mentioned earlier, the Service also developed a data base of unmet operational needs. Currently, the RONS data base has identified needs in excess of \$1.2 billion. This number represents the opportunities that a fully functional System could take advantage of. However, both Congress and CARE have worked with the Service to further screen and prioritize these identified needs into what is now called "Tier 1" of the RONS data base. Even with this screening process, Tier 1 has identified high priority projects that require an additional \$355 million annually.

The types of projects contained in the Tier 1 list are those that begin to implement the Refuge Improvement Act. These projects include inventorying and monitoring biological resources, enhancing priority wildlife-dependent public uses, controlling invasive exotic species and preparing Comprehensive Conservation Plans. All of these projects require not only funding, but also an increase of staff to get them done. Unlike maintenance, operational projects are, for the most part, people. Downsizing the Federal Government and implementing the Refuge Improvement Act are clearly in conflict. At this point, further progress in reducing both the maintenance backlog and operations needs requires more staff. The current staff is spread so thin that adding responsibilities is not a viable option.

At present approximately 280 refuges (53 percent) do not have any full time staff and less than 15 percent of refuge visitors have an opportunity to interact with refuge staff. It is important to note that most of the "staff" that visitors contact are actually volunteers. Without volunteer efforts the Refuge System would be in even more dire straits. Most refuges lack maps, signs and simple brochures that would enhance a visitor's experience and increase the public's understanding of the goals of the System. While the System does not want to be a National Park Service, it should strive to provide high-quality, wildlife-dependent, recreational and educational experiences that are supported by basic informational material. Unfortunately, the current budget does not allow such a "luxury." We are grateful to this Committee for the Refuge Improvement Act, much needed legislation which clarified the mission of the system, identified six priority wildlife-dependent activities and set forth an aggressive planning process to determine the future management of the various refuge units. Significant new resources are needed to implement this legislation. The Service's planning process is well underway and, I am happy to report, improving steadily. Currently, almost 100 Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP) have been initiated, of which twenty-two have been completed. According to reports we are receiving from our members, each successive plan is more complete and involves more public input. The improvements result partly from new policies issued by the Service on how to conduct these planning exercises and partly because refuge staff are learning how best to create these important documents. Unfortunately, over 200 additional plans are required. Given the current availability of resources, I seriously doubt whether the Service will be able to complete so many plans in the timeframe called for in the Act.

We also hope that these plans do not become a cruel joke played on the public. The Service is developing these plans in good faith and actively seeking involvement from the neighbors, nearby communities, interested organizations, state wildlife agencies and Federal agencies. Essentially, the Service is asking a broad segment of the public to help it determine what role a particular refuge should play in conserving wildlife and providing wildlife-dependent recreation. The collective vision of this process is then synthesized into the CCP. We strongly support this process. However, if the government asks people for their vision, we must be prepared to commit the resources needed to have that vision come to fruition. I hope this will be the case.

Finally, I want to congratulate this Committee on the successful passage of the Refuge Centennial Act at the end of the last session. This act calls for two important items. First, it created a Centennial Commission to help guide the Service in planning the celebration activities for this momentous event. Second, it calls for the Service to develop a "legacy plan" to insure that the Refuge System meets its obligations under the Refuge Improvement Act and other laws. As mentioned earlier, the Improvement Act has the potential to become the blueprint for our collective vision of what the System should be. We urge you to follow the development of both the plan and the activities of the soon-to-be-created Commission to ensure that the will of Congress is followed. We also hope that you will continue to provide the leadership needed to resolve this crisis.

Mr. Chairman, the National Wildlife Refuge Association stands ready to assist you in whatever way we can. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Mr. BOHLEN. I couldn't read this monitor here.

Mr. GILCHREST. That is all right, Mr. Bohlen. We always let you go a little beyond that light if you so choose.

Mr. BOHLEN. I think I will just leave it at that, thank you.

Mr. GILCHREST. All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Ashe, would you say that we have a problem with a maintenance backlog, we have a problem with staffing at numerous facilities? We heard that there is even problems with modern day society as far as unruly people on the refuges and drugs on the refuges and so on and so forth.

And what we are trying to do here is to—and it would really be nice if our maintenance backlog was eliminated by 2003. We will do what we can with the Appropriations Committee on that score. I guess we are trying to focus on two fundamental things: how do we substantially reduce the backlog in an efficient, competent, effective way; and balance that with the limited dollars to make sure that we have an appropriate conservation plan—and I know that word “appropriate” is a relative term depending on who is saying it—but have significant progress in the next few years with these Comprehensive Conservation Plans. Would you say at all, Mr. Ashe, that developing conservation plans, the dollars that takes to do that, the dollars that it takes to purchase new refuges, and then in some cases minimal management of those refuges, does that in any way take away or exacerbate the problem with the cost of the backlog in maintenance?

Mr. ASHE. Mr. Chairman, you are asking me if the development of CCPs and the acquisition of new lands is taking us away from the task of dealing with the maintenance backlogs; is that your question?

Mr. GILCHREST. Yes.

Mr. ASHE. I guess I will deal with them just separately if I can. I don't think that CCPs are. I think that the—I think in the end, a Comprehensive Conservation Plan, if it is done successfully, is going to sharpen our view of what our job is on the refuge and build community consensus and support for doing that work, and so I think that done well, the Comprehensive Conservation Planning process will help us in meeting that goal of dealing with our maintenance needs and our operational needs in the most effective way possible.

I think that land acquisition, clearly the acquisition of new lands—when we acquire new lands, they bring along with them maintenance needs. If we buy a new piece of land adjacent to the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, then we have to go out there and post boundary signs, so in the immediate sense, you know, it takes people to go out and post the property. We may discover things that we didn't know about the property. There may be debris or structures on the property that need to be removed. They may include water control structures or roads or trails that need to be maintained.

Mr. GILCHREST. Would you suggest the agency slow down the acquisition of new refuges because of the present backlog?

Mr. ASHE. I think that like, as with many things, there is a balance between the acquisition of new land and taking care of what we have. I think that has always been a difficult balance for the

Service and the Department and the Congress to make. We have habitat conservation needs out there that require the addition of new land and new property to the Refuge System. Clearly, when we do that, it increases our maintenance and our operational obligation, so—

Mr. GILCHREST. Is there sort of an active sense in the Service that—and I think in my own experience there is—an active sense in the Service to be very proactive in community involvement, as far as some of the more routine maintenance refuges are concerned, to have the district supervisor or the local supervisor or even a local refuge manager, involved in the local Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce? It is hard to get people to volunteer, but—I mean, it's not in their job description to be a Boy Scout leader or a Cub Scout leader, or go to local community activities to get people on a refuge to pick up trash or to do things like that, but is that an active sense in the Service, that is a positive thing?

Mr. ASHE. Absolutely. And most of our refuge managers—while you are right, it is not in their job description—but most of our refuge managers are involved in Lions Club, Rotary Club, local Chamber of Commerce, all of the above, and so they are very tied into the local communities. We encourage them to be involved in those kind of organizations at the local level. It does help build community support and volunteer base within the Refuge System, and volunteers are an increasingly important part of our work force, but they also require supervision. And so in order to effectively use volunteers, we need people on the refuge to supervise them and make sure that when they come out they feel like they are being gainfully employed, and their talents are being used appropriately on the refuge. So that is something that we need to expand in the future as well, is our ability to use volunteers in the best way we possibly can.

Mr. GILCHREST. Would anybody else on the panel like to address the priority needs of our refuges? Should the sole focus be, for the next few years, on the maintenance backlog? Can you balance that with the purchase of new refuges, or should there be a moratorium on the purchase of new refuges until this maintenance backlog gets completed or the conservation plans are complete? Is there any troubling aspect to any of those areas by anybody on the—any of the witnesses?

Mr. HORN. Mr. Chairman, I think that if you look at the Fish and Wildlife Service budget as it relates to the refuge, you are looking really at fundamentally four categories: land acquisition, a construction account, an operations account, and a maintenance account. And, obviously, when Congress is appropriating the funds and the agency leadership is putting together the budget, as Mr. Ashe indicated, there is a balance among them.

I would suspect that given the maintenance backlog and given the concerns on operations, my advice would be to focus heavily on those two areas and watch very carefully the land acquisition expenditures and watch very carefully the construction expenditures for new facilities and new items, which, of course, immediately and automatically contribute additional requirements to the maintenance side of the ledger. And it is a tough, balance. There are some places you need a visitor center, but I think that a little bit of dis-

cipline by the agency, and maybe some discipline here, would probably help contribute some of the dollars toward the less than sexy O&M account, which is real easy to get shortchanged.

Mr. GILCHREST. You are suggesting discipline here in the House?

Mr. HORN. Just, I think, discipline within the agencies, and I know in my past tenure, it is real easy to—I think the agency traditionally asks for a fairly modest amount in its construction account, and every year the construction account gets increased two or three times because people like to see visitor centers and they like to see high-profile projects. Unfortunately, maintenance isn't high profile and isn't very sexy, isn't very attractive, and that is a difficult part of the mix.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you, Mr. Horn. I am going to—we are going to come around for a second round. Some of the members have to leave for other meetings, and my time is up. So I will yield now to Mr. Underwood.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for all your testimonies. It is good to see you again, Dr. Beard.

Basically I am trying to understand the interaction between the capacity of Fish and Wildlife to acquire property, and as an executive agency can acquire property through executive action, which marks it a little bit different than the National Park Service. Your own operations and your own maintenance backlogs, and also what was referred to by Dan as institutional neglect. And so the basic question I would just like to ask—and maybe you could respond to this, Mr. Ashe—is in trying to understand—let's say under the best-case scenario, we were able to get a lot of funding for maintenance backlogs. Institutionally, the way Fish and Wildlife is placed within the Department of Interior and the kind of suggestion that was proposed by Dan, as well as the ongoing authority of Fish and Wildlife to acquire more property through executive action, how—it is a question of balance, I understand. But let's say we were able to get significant funding for maintenance backlog, would this basically resolve the issue, or is there some merit, or how would you react to Dan's suggestion?

Mr. ASHE. I guess I will start with the issue of how to manage the maintenance backlog. And certainly if Congress or the administration wanted to support an objective of eliminating the maintenance backlog by 2003, which I have heard here today, I mean that certainly would be a good thing for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Our approach, however, has been to try to get ourselves in a position where we are managing our deferred maintenance needs. And we have seen that with increased appropriations over the last several years, that we have been able to significantly lessen the growth, the annual rate of growth in our maintenance backlog. And so the Refuge System is like everything else. At my house I maintain a deferred maintenance backlog. There are things in my home that need repair, but I live with them because I don't have the time or the dollars or the inclination to repair them, so I live with them. And they, from time to time, may be inconveniences, but they don't stop my home from providing its basic function.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. You don't keep expanding your home either.

Mr. ASHE. Well, actually, I just bought a new home.

[Laughter.]

Mr. ASHE. We believe that we can manage our backlog in much the same way if we can get to a level of funding where we will be able to—not to get the slope on a decline, so we are eliminating our backlog, it is no longer increasing, but we are actually decreasing our backlog over time. And that would be a good place for us to be, so that we can manage that backlog over time.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. What about the structure, the institutional structure of Fish and Wildlife in Department of Interior; could you just respond to that briefly?

Mr. ASHE. I think that changing institutional structure requires the expenditure of a great amount of energy, and what—and it also divides people. Discussion about changing bureaucracy and moving people around is a divisive factor and a divisive suggestion. We all, sitting around this table, agree. We agree that the Refuge System can do more for the conservation of wildlife in America. We agree that requires some additional resources, maintenance and operations, and so that is a uniting force for us, I think. We need to work together toward that as a solution, rather than focusing on changing organizational structure because many people will disagree about that and it will cause this group at this table to work against one another rather than with one another.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Okay. Could I just ask one more question, Mr. Chairman? On the Comprehensive Conservation Plans, which apparently are—I understand, as you have explained them, that it is taking a great deal of energy, especially the initial ones, you are going to have to figure out how to do these best. One of the criticisms—I guess I would label it a criticism—offered by Mr. Horn, is the treatment of state agencies in the formulation of these conservation plans, and treating state agencies as if they were just one of several constituent groups rather than as partners. You probably, obviously, realize that I have a little heartburn with one of your refuges. And to some extent I share some of those criticisms. So how would you respond to the statements by Mr. Horn?

Mr. ASHE. I think in some respects the criticism is deserved on our part. I think that, again, Comprehensive Conservation Planning is something new to the Fish and Wildlife Service. We had done planning before in Alaska under the Alaskan National Interest Lands Conservation Act. But outside of Alaska, it is a relatively new experience for us, and so over the last three years we have been learning how to do planning. But right now with the new policy framework that we had in place for the last year, we invite state and territorial governments and tribal governments to be involved in the planning team from the outset, so at the initiation of planning, our policy requires our regional director to write to the state or territorial or tribal government, and invite them to be a member of the planning team, so they are actually on the planning team. And we believe that is going to improve our ability to work with the states.

And as I said in my testimony, with a number of states, we are working very closely and successfully on Comprehensive Conservation Plans.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Well, I will certainly keep a close eye on that. Thank you, Mr. Ashe.

Dr. BEARD. Could I provide another perspective on that?

Mr. GILCHREST. If I could just—yes, sir. And we are going to come back, and I don't know if Mr. Jones can come back, but I want to yield to Mr. Jones at this time because we do have a vote.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

And, Mr. Ashe, I am certain that you are familiar with the Lodge at Lake Mattamuskeet, and to the panel, to the Committee members, this is a focal point in the area called Hyde County, and it is a county of about 3,000 people, and this lodge is almost like a church to them. It is very special. And I guess because of time—I really want to ask you if you could provide me—the lodge was closed to the public from 1974 to 1993, almost 20 years. And it is my understanding from the citizens from that area who love this lodge, that they came up with about—the private sector—about \$800,000, which was a big help to Fish and Wildlife to reopen the lodge.

If you could provide the Committee, with the Chairman's permission, how much money the Fish and Wildlife spent on the upkeep of that lodge or the renovation of that lodge between 1974 and 1993.

Mr. ASHE. All right. I will provide that for the record.

Mr. JONES. In addition, Mr. Chairman, I have got two other questions, and I would then like to make just a couple of statements.

The second question: how much money is the Fish and Wildlife Service dedicating to the stabilization of this structure during Fiscal Year 2001?

Mr. Chairman and the ranking member, they are having a structural problem with the metal within the building. My understanding is that is going to be about \$3 million.

And how much money is the Fish and Wildlife Service requesting for Fiscal Year 2002 for the stabilization of the lodge?

Mr. ASHE. I will work backwards. With respect to 2002, I can't comment on that, because it is part of the President's budget, and it will be out, released on April 9th. With respect to currently in Fiscal Year 2001, we have \$400,000 that we are holding to make structural repairs—

Mr. JONES. 400,000?

Mr. ASHE. 400,000, to repair the columns in the lodge, but that is not enough funding to make the necessary repairs, so we haven't done any work at this point, but we have the funding available.

I see on my note here that from 1974 to present, we had spent roughly \$400,000 on maintenance of the Mattamuskeet Lodge, but I will check that for the record to make sure that is—

Mr. JONES. With other facilities that you have the responsibility in maintaining, would you say that amount of money in roughly a 20-year period of time is about average, or would you say that is woefully under average for maintaining property, the figure you just shared with the Committee?

Mr. ASHE. I guess I couldn't give you an average, Congressman. It kind of depends on what the facility, and for a structure like the

Mattamuskeet Lodge, \$400,000 over a 25-year period is probably about average or maybe less than average I would imagine.

Mr. JONES. Well, I know. I have listened to my colleagues on the Committee and some of the responses from the panel, which I found very interesting, wish I could come back. I have been in Congress six years. This is the beginning of my seventh year. And, again, I have the greatest respect for Fish and Wildlife, but it seems like—whether the administration is Democrat or Republican, it seems like when it comes to maintaining what we own, we don't do a very good job. And, again, that is not a criticism toward you or Fish and Wildlife. I think it is just generally that for those of us who happens to be conservers, it seems like that the government just wants to continue to grow and expand, and yet, when we grow and expand and we want more properties, we just don't seem to have the money to take care of what we are trying to garner, so to speak, as far as our assets.

So, Mr. Chairman, I will look forward to working with you and the ranking member. I think this problem is indicative throughout. We see the same thing with Park Service. It just seems like they continue to expand, and yet we have a responsibility, I think, to maintain what we own as the Federal Government. We are just not doing a very good job, and again, I look forward to working with the Chairman, the ranking member and the Appropriations Committee, because I think this is a cancer that is just getting worse and worse. And I think sometimes the cancer gets so bad, you just can't control it, and you have a facility that you can't save any longer.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you, Mr. Jones.

We will take a 20-minute break.

[Recess]

Mr. GILCHREST. The Subcommittee will come back to order. We appreciate your patience. We will try not to keep people here any longer than is necessary.

I have a few more questions, and Mr. Underwood has a few more questions. I would like to start with, I guess a question that would be—I would like each of you to respond if you would want to, and that is dealing with something that Dr. Beard and I think Dr. Sparrowe may have said also. Do you think that the Refuge System should be a separate entity, a separate agency? Would that be positive or negative, and why? Dr. Beard, would you want to go first on that?

Dr. BEARD. Well, I think the answer from our perspective is yes. We think this is the only way that we can think of to make the Refuge System all that it can be and reach its greatest potential. Right now the Refuge System comprises approximately half of the staff and half of the budget of the Fish and Wildlife Service. But it is one of 17 direct reports to the Director. As a result it always competes against other high-priority uses for the attention of budget dollars, for the time of the Director and for the other leadership in the department.

We spent a couple of years trying to gain support for our proposal. We are still at it. We have got a long way to go. But we are not giving up—we support it. We think this is the right way to go.

But we are open to any other ideas for making the Refuge System a better system, and to address the problems that face the National Wildlife Refuge System itself.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you. Dr. Sparrowe?

Dr. SPARROWE. I do not support such a proposal for two categories of reasons. One is its impact potentially on the Fish and Wildlife Service, the second is the Refuge System itself and the progress we have been making.

I believe that most of the organizations I have been working with for the past six years, now going on seven, are committed to making the current process work. We have learned a lot, we think the Congress has learned a lot, we think the Fish and Wildlife Service has learned a lot.

One of the things you may not know is that in the course of working through the CARE group, we have systematically met with regional directors of the Fish and Wildlife Service, with the Director of the Agency, with other people in Interior, and with the managers at the regional level, the people who work with the folks out in the field. And we think we are making progress in carrying the message that this is a system that needs to be given a priority, if we are going to be able to help you working for you from the outside.

Secondly, you look at the Fish and Wildlife Service, its basic authority is for migratory birds, and endangered species, and some other things that fit very well with the Refuge System, and we think a separation would be an artificial separation that wouldn't be good. We have a model in the rather arbitrary removal of research from Interior agencies. The Fish and Wildlife Service lost a thousand of its most highly trained people and \$80 million eight years ago. From my perspective, having studied it and worked with it all the way through, both opposing it and in trying to keep money coming into the research function, given the lot that we were presented with—

Mr. GILCHREST. But they were removed for the biological survey?

Dr. SPARROWE. To make the biological survey. What I am talking about is the fallout within the Agency, the Fish and Wildlife Service was affected profoundly in its culture, its science—

Mr. GILCHREST. Most of the people from Fish and Wildlife went to USGS to conduct that survey?

Dr. SPARROWE. Most of the survey was composed of people who came from the Fish and Wildlife Service. By far, the biggest chunk of staff and money—

Mr. GILCHREST. And many of them came from the Refuge System?

Dr. SPARROWE. No, sir. What I am suggesting is that the impact on the Agency of the removal of such a large component of its staff, and money, and authorities would have a profound impact on the future of the Agency and the way in which it would carry out its authorities in a lot of important areas.

Mr. GILCHREST. Mr. Ashe, what is the status or do you have any idea, when the biological survey debate came on board here, and then it, through some compromise, it shifted from U.S. Fish and Wildlife to USGS, as I remember, many people from Fish and Wild-

life conducted part of the survey for USGS. They were transferred to USGS. How did all of that work, and are they still there?

Mr. ASHE. Many of them are still there. We did, as Dr. Sparrowe said, have a separate research function within the Fish and Wildlife Service that included cooperative research units based at State land grant universities, and so we had a programmatic organization within the Service that supported our research needs.

When the original biological survey was created, all of those people and facilities were picked up in a block and moved to the new national biological survey, a separate agency. Subsequently, that agency then was placed into a division within the United States Geological Survey, where they reside today, the Biological Resources Division. Those facilities and those people, many of them, are still there.

Mr. GILCHREST. Is the survey ongoing?

Mr. ASHE. It is not a survey. It is basically a research capacity. These are people that do research on fish and wildlife to support Fish and Wildlife conservation needs. And so we do work with them, as do the other agencies, the Park Service—

Mr. GILCHREST. Do you see them as detracting from Fish and Wildlife's effort to develop conservation plans for each refuge?

Mr. ASHE. I don't see them detracting. In fact, they can serve as a great asset. In some of our regions and refuges, we have great relationship with the Biological Resources Division and are getting good support from them in building our comprehensive plans. In other areas, we are not, and that is something that we are beginning to address with the Geological Survey, is trying to get more consistent support to do the biological work and the monitoring work that is needed to support a good comprehensive planning process.

Mr. GILCHREST. At the time, I felt that a biological survey was a rather logical thing to do for this country. My assessment on that has not changed. I hope, though, that we can make an effort to shore up those biologists for Fish and Wildlife to do two things: One, specific biological research and ecological understanding for each refuge, certainly, in compatibility with the overall intent of the biological survey, in general.

Mr. Horn?

Mr. HORN. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

WLFA strongly opposes separating out the Refuge System from under the auspices of the Fish and Wildlife Service for two fundamental purposes: One, echoing what Dr. Sparrowe said, many refuges are created for migratory bird conservation purposes, many for Endangered Species Act purposes, and to fracture the relationship or the responsibility for those programs from their land component I don't think makes any sense, from a conservation perspective.

And secondly, having served as an assistant secretary, looking over both the Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, having the National Park Service as a separate stand-alone agency to administer the national park system has done nothing to facilitate their dealing with O&M and backlog problems. Indeed, I suspect, if you attend the Park Subcommittee hearings, their backlog problems are just as bad, if not worse. About every 5 to 10 years, the

Secretary comes along and says, "Gee, we have to announce this new program, and shovel billions of dollars into the Park Service to catch up with their O&M backlog," so that having separate status for the Park Service, with its park system, hasn't solved its problems, and I doubt that having separate status for the Refuge System will solve any of its problems either.

Mr. GILCHREST. I see. I have some other questions, but I am going to yield now to Mr. Underwood.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ashe, you know, in terms of the GAO study, as you know, last year there was a GAO study completed, an audit of deferred maintenance in the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the GAO was pretty critical on how the Service set priorities for deferred maintenance. What have you done as a result of that GAO study?

Mr. ASHE. Mr. Underwood, they were critical of a number of aspects of our maintenance program, mostly dealing with how we estimate costs for projects, and asked us to do a better job of doing condition assessments on our projects. We have been addressing that. We have reserved money in our maintenance. We requested funds from Congress last year as part of our maintenance budget to hire facility condition coordinators in the regional offices. Congress granted that request, so we have hired people in the regions to coordinate our work to do and to maintain the information about the condition of our facilities and to help us do better estimates, engineering estimates, about the costs of addressing those needs.

They asked us to put together a maintenance handbook as a guide to our people on how to identify and estimate the costs of dealing with maintenance projects and keep track of maintenance projects, and we are working on that. We are behind schedule in addressing that aspect of the GAO report, but we are responding to it.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Okay. I know that you mean this chart to be a good news chart over there. So can you explain to me how that is a good news chart because I am trying to understand it. If you have maintenance backlog growth, it is not actually reducing your maintenance backlog. Am I correct in assuming that?

Mr. ASHE. That is right. Our maintenance backlog is increasing.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Okay.

Mr. ASHE. But what we have seen since 1997 is the rate of growth has decreased. And if we overlaid congressional appropriations on that chart, you would see that congressional appropriations have gone up, in terms of annual appropriations to deal with our maintenance backlog. And what that chart tells me is that it is having the right effect. By applying dollars and resources to a problem, we are de-escalating the rate of growth, the rate at which our backlog is growing.

So, at some point in the future, if we continue to make investment, we will be able to stop the growth in the backlog and then begin to buy down the backlog so it is actually reduced over time.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Okay.

Dr. BEARD. I wonder if I could comment on that because I have the same reaction, which is, if we are at a 7-percent growth rate, that means that the backlog is going to double in 10 years. That is generally what a 7-percent growth rate is. Now, obviously, the

yearly rate of increase is going down, and that is good news, but we have got a long ways to go.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Yes. I found it a very curious chart because, obviously, normally you would think that the maintenance backlog was being reduced. That would be the measure of success. But if the growth of the backlog is only being reduced, your maintenance backlog actually is continuing to grow over time.

Dr. SPARROWE. If I could make a point, in the progress of working with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and particularly refuge managers, we have been before this Committee before, the CARE group has, pointing out that the advent of a planning process now, and getting some new money to refuge managers, has literally provided hope to people who were used to doing without in the past. And that is another reason that some of these backlogs are coming forward. People believe there may be a chance they will get money to fix some things, and so they won't just go along with the bailing wire.

If you look at the budget in the Southeastern United States for refuges, I think those people have something like 4 percent to work with in flexible money over their operational costs, and this is the kind of thing you are looking at refuges now. The managers have hope. They are doing these plans, and it is going to result in requests for more money.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Very good. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you, Mr. Underwood.

Mr. Bohlen, several years ago, in response to a peer study, 85 percent of refuge managers expressed serious concern about the future of the Refuge System. Do you have some sense as to how they feel today, how you feel today, and your considerations for the Audubon's proposal that the Refuge System to be a separate agency?

Mr. BOHLEN. Yes, I would be happy to comment on that.

Let me say that many of our members still feel a degree of discontent, and strongly support the Audubon proposal. Our board has not supported it, but we fully recognize and are sympathetic to the reasons that created this new campaign. I would like to commend Audubon for raising this issue because in the last year, it has forced us, forced everyone, including the Service, to really address the problems of why there is such discontent among the refuge managers and why they continually feel they are treated as second-class citizens.

I commend Mr. Ashe and his former director for addressing this issue last year. They took a few small steps to correct the problem, but, frankly, I think there needs to be further steps taken to increase the stature of the Refuge System within the Service. If this need isn't satisfied, if there aren't further steps, I think that you are going to see increasing calls for a separate agency.

I, personally, having served in Interior, don't believe that is a wise decision. I don't believe it is the best for the Refuge System, I don't believe it is the best for the Service, for the reasons that Dr. Sparrowe and Mr. Horn have already put forth. But I do think there is a problem that needs addressing.

Mr. GILCHREST. The 85 percent of the refuge managers that expressed concern about the future of the Refuge System, what was their concern? Was it that Congress didn't appropriate enough money? Congress didn't have enough understanding of the difference between a refuge system and the park system? The public didn't pay that much attention to it? Was it an institutional thing, where the Fish and Wildlife regional directors didn't have enough sensitivity to the issues of the local refuge and didn't deal with it in an attitudinal way? Do you know specifically what—

Mr. BOHLEN. There are as you suggest, many, reasons. But I think you have to look back in history when refuges were the major component of the Fish and Wildlife Service. In the last 20 years, the Service has acquired more and more authority for other programs, such as Endangered Species, and the perception has grown that the Refuge System has suffered as a result. It gets less attention. It gets less money. There is a perception—and I am not sure it is factual—but there is certainly a perception that money appropriated for the Refuge System gets siphoned off for other programs within the Service, and all of this has led to a feeling, as I said, of the refuge managers being second-class citizens.

A lot of this is probably not accurate, but the perception is there, and that is certainly what Audubon is trying to address by forcing a discussion of this issue.

Mr. GILCHREST. To refocus, certainly there has been a lot of attention, especially in the last 10 years, on species loss, habitat loss outside of the public lands, and that has drawn certainly attention away from the Fish and Wildlife Service that have been involved in those worthy, but certainly controversial activities and issues. Is there something, not to take away the need to understand that biological diversity is the strength and health of the ecosystem which supports human beings, but I guess I think we can probably see the reason that the Audubon Society would like to see the Refuge System as a separate entity so that, in and of itself, the highest priority of the Refuge System is the Refuge System. So the emphasis and the focus is geared toward the Refuge System.

And, Mr. Bohlen, you made an interesting comment that the Fish and Wildlife Service used to almost exclusively focus on the Refuge System, which was the backbone of Fish and Wildlife Service. So I guess what we need to do is try to find some leadership, some mechanism to focus that attention equally and powerfully on the Refuge System.

Mr. BOHLEN. I think you are absolutely correct, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GILCHREST. I want to read the next question and then get some various responses.

In the policy adopted in May 2000, the Service states that the implementation of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan should maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System. By statute, Comprehensive Conservation Plans must identify and describe the following three things: the distribution, migration patterns, and abundance of fish, wildlife, and plant populations, and related habitats within the refuge; significant problems that may adversely affect the populations of habitats of fish, wildlife, and plants within the refuge; and the actions necessary to correct or mitigate some problems.

In preparing or revising CCPs, the Service must consult with adjoining Federal, State, and local, and private landowners, and affected State conservation agencies, and coordinate the development of the conservation plan or revision within relevant State conservation plans for fish, and wildlife, and their habitats.

How does the Service integrate these instructions to promote meaningful habitat management throughout important ecosystems?

A second question, an essay question on your final exam.

[Laughter.]

Mr. GILCHREST. I don't know if that is an undergraduate or a master's thesis.

Mr. ASHE. I think that is a Ph.D.

[Laughter.]

Mr. ASHE. I guess, Mr. Chairman, in many respects, your question hits at the crux of the challenge of developing a comprehensive conservation plan. And as I said in my testimony, our progress has not been such that I believe, at this point, that we will be able to meet the goal of completing all of our Comprehensive Conservation Plans by the statutory deadline of 2012.

The start-up period has been slow. I think we are getting into a little bit of a stride now, with respect to comprehensive plans, but it is a messy business. It involves a lot of consultation with the public. They are taking a lot longer than we thought they would. People are very interested in these plans, and that is good. That is a good thing.

But your question, you know, identifying the distribution of habitats, significant disturbances, how to mitigate those impacts, those are all difficult things. They take a significant expenditure of resources in order to do them well: biologists, recreation planners, engineers. It takes a significant expertise. It takes information in and of itself, and a lot of times when we are doing these CCPs, the first thing we have to do is take a big, giant step backward and say we really don't know enough about the refuge to do a comprehensive plan. So, before we even get started, we need to go out and gather information that we need to do—

Mr. GILCHREST. How do you gather the information? Let's say, wherever the refuge might be, whether it is Wyoming or Maryland or Alaska or California or Hawaii, how do you gather the information? I would assume that some of the information, to develop a conservation plan, would have to be, to some degree, historic information about that particular ecological system over a period of time. Do you get that from local universities, a local courthouse, the Audubon Society? Where does that data come from?

Mr. ASHE. It comes from all of the above and more, and we rely on university researchers. We rely on graduate students, wherever the manager can assemble the information. And you are right, we encourage our managers, in the comprehensive planning process, to look at the refuge in context of the landscape around them, both the historical context of that landscape and the current context of the landscape. And those are, again, that requires some judgment on the part of the manager, especially to look back and try to determine how that system functioned before there were large-scale alterations, dams and rivers or fences on the prairie or large-scale agriculture, things like that.

So it does require the exercise of judgment on the part of the manager, hopefully, with the benefit of good information.

Dr. BEARD. Could I address that for a second?

Mr. GILCHREST. Yes.

Dr. BEARD. Because you gave a long test and a long exam question, and I want to jump in and take a crack at it.

It seems to me that, as you have been discussing this problem with Mr. Ashe, the one thing we all need to do is put on our common-sense hat here. What we are doing is we have a tremendous land management system, and the policy makes eminent sense to me. We have got to know what the resources are that are on these lands. If we don't know that, how can you manage them intelligently?

The second thing you have to know is what are the threats? It doesn't mean you have to address them all, but at least you have got to catalogue the threats that are there. The threats are substantial, as we have pointed out in our report.

The third item is you have to figure out the different ways of addressing those threats. It doesn't mean you have to address them, but at least have a strategy for trying to deal with them.

I think what is more disturbing is the whole question of the plans. As Mr. Ashe pointed out, there is a statutory deadline here which, at the time, was set at 15 years to do these plans. We are now 11 years out from the deadline, and we are being told that they are not going to make it. Well, it seems to me that what we need to do is get people off their duff and get working, either get more resources, get better management or do something. In 11 years, with all due respect, I will probably be retired, one of your constituents, Mr. Chairman, on the Eastern Shore, and bugging you with letters.

Mr. GILCHREST. You will be wearing suspenders by then.

Dr. BEARD. Hopefully, I will be in Margaritaville with Jimmy Buffett.

[Laughter.]

Dr. BEARD. But I will be somewhere. But that is 11 years from now. It seems to me this is one of the crown jewels of our land management system. We have got to get on with it, and the job is not that difficult. We don't have to make this complex. Other land management agencies have done this. It is not a hopeless exercise, and it seems to me that we are all committed to doing it and finding a solution.

Mr. GILCHREST. Dr. Beard, with your experience in this area, now, I don't have a biological degree, I was a civics teacher in a local high school that accidentally got elected to Congress—

[Laughter.]

Mr. GILCHREST. —literally. But I have always liked to spend time outdoors. And it seems, from a nonscientific background, that to walk over a refuge, if I was the responsible party for that refuge, you know, barring a 19-million-acre refuge, but looking at 30,000 acres, 50,000 acres, 100,000 acres, even a million acres, that within a given period of time, I would have some sense, by partnering with people, what the flora and fauna was out there. And while you were addressing that issue, you would also be, I assume, getting some essence of that natural ecosystem over a set period of time,

maybe designated before it was in a highly populated area, and then having an understanding of the resources, the present threats that there are to that resource, and then how to address those threats.

So, Dr. Beard, in your sense, do you think, with the present acreage under Fish and Wildlife, that they could complete it in a competent fashion on or before that date?

Dr. BEARD. Yes. I think that the question is how do you do it. If you do it only with Federal employees or you do it the way they are currently doing it, you are not going to make it. They have already told us that. They have told us that if we continue to do this the way we have been doing it, and 11 years go by, we won't finish the job. So it strikes me that if you know you are not going to make it, then the management of the Fish and Wildlife Service has to figure out a different way to do it.

There are literally thousands of people in this country who want to help—30,000 volunteers. We have 60,000 people every December that work on the Christmas bird count, volunteers who go out and do inventory work. We have something called a Great Backyard Bird Count, which is one weekend in February. This last February, 75,000 people went out and participated in that program. There are literally tens of thousands of people in this country that can help with data collection, analysis. There are volunteers. We can work to build a constituency to raise more money from the Congress or from other sources.

So there are enumerable ways of addressing this issue. If we have got 11 years to work on it, we have got a lot of time to address the problem.

Mr. GILCHREST. Dr. Sparrowe, did you want to comment on this?

Dr. SPARROWE. I agree with many of the things that Dan has just suggested. I think we do need to address some of these other—

Mr. GILCHREST. Is that Dan Ashe or Dan Beard?

Dr. SPARROWE. Both, actually.

[Laughter.]

Dr. SPARROWE. Both Dans. I think there should be some ways to make this work. I think it is appropriate that the Service tell us now that they are having trouble going about it the way they are going about it.

If we look at what is going on throughout Government, one of the problems with these planning processes is at least partly caused by some of us sitting at this table, in that the challenges to everything an agency does results in a very formal legalistic process, both of getting public input and of writing these documents, and being concerned constantly that somebody is going to challenge you on the nuances of words and the nuances of phrases. This why some of us, for example, responded to the ecological integrity policy by reminding the Service that, hey, wait a minute, the purpose of the refuge may be something intrinsically different than restoring ecological integrity.

Mr. GILCHREST. I was going to ask you about that.

Dr. SPARROWE. Yes, I mean, if you look at it, a migratory bird refuge, for example, many of them, are in agricultural areas where much of the landscape has been changed. And if you think about what the past must have been like—and there is information about

this—the resources available to migratory birds were dispersed in lots of little areas that occurred with flooding, and with blow-downs, and after fires, and all kinds of other disturbances. All of that is gone now. We have a landscape that is managed by people to produce crops and to live there. So a refuge, in that context, often is an island of habitat within a vast area that has been markedly changed, probably forever. So the refuge itself, as this postage stamp, has to be looked at differently than just looking at the landscape and like it was pre-Colombian times.

So wrestling with some of these concepts is not easy.

Mr. GILCHREST. But do you think it is a good idea, just for planning purposes, to have some sense of what it looked like pre-1500 to the way it looks like now so that, if you are going to create a conservation plan, you will look for what used to be and what is likely to be more successful, as far as habitat is concerned, what that ecosystem probably was like then, including the flora and fauna that kept that ecosystem together? And while creating a conservation plan—I think I said this the other day—if the—this is sort of an elementary example—but in a refuge in Maine, you wouldn't want to plant magnolia trees.

But the ecological integrity, and I understand some of the ramifications of that are legal terms, you put that in a Government document, that creates problems. But as far as the conservation plans are concerned, some knowledge of the ecosystem pre-1500, and adapting that into a conservation plan, would that be a good idea?

Dr. SPARROWE. The key and operative word, I think, is "where appropriate," which occurs throughout a lot of this stuff. In some cases, it would not be appropriate. It would not tell you much. Certainly, when a manager takes a look at what he's going to do in the landscape, he or she, they should look at the historical context, and the flora and fauna that were there and lots of other things.

But then the next step is also to keep in mind what is the purpose of this refuge. Where appropriate, they can restore habitats that are illustrative of the past and lots of really good important things. That is different than starting out by saying, well, my job is to restore what used to be here a thousand years ago or 200 years ago. That isn't necessarily the first step that is going to be very helpful, but certainly the knowledge about what was there and how it all worked is very important to the process.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you.

Does anybody else want to make a comment either to the Fish and Wildlife limit on creating these conservation management plans over the next 11 years or the term "ecological integrity"?

Mr. ASHE. I will make a comment on the former, Mr. Chairman.

I guess, as I said, all I am trying to do is tell the Subcommittee where we are and give you an honest impression of where we are today, as I see it today, given our current level of effort. And as Dan said, and I would say, of course, if we increased our level of effort, then we could accomplish comprehensive conservation planning faster.

But I think what the hearing today, in my view, has probably given the Subcommittee a good understanding of the issues they are facing, the Fish and Wildlife Service, in managing the Refuge System. Do we grow or do we not grow the Refuge System? Do we

repair dilapidated lodges and other structures or do we not repair them? Do we control invasive species or do we not control them? Do we do CCPs on time or do we not do them on time? Do we restore where appropriate or do we not? All of those are all questions that face every refuge manager almost every day. And given the available resources to manage the Refuge System, those are challenging questions for us.

And so when Congress gave us a task to do comprehensive planning for 93 million acres of land, they gave us \$4.5 million to do that job. Multiply 4.5 by 15, and that will tell you, over that 15-year period, how much we have to do the job of comprehensive planning. That is not enough. We are subsidizing that effort now to the tune of an additional \$4 million. So we have pulled from our operating budget another \$4 million so that our level of effort is actually twice what Congress had given us specifically for the task. But those are the resources that we have been given to do the job, and over a 15-year window of time, given all of the other things, the challenges that are facing the Refuge System, it is a difficult task, at best.

Mr. GILCHREST. I think you expressed it very well.

Mr. Hansen and myself have sent a letter to the President asking him to increase the budget for Fish and Wildlife by \$75 million, and we hope we can work with the appropriators and convince the President that because of the comprehensive nature of Fish and Wildlife's responsibilities, that is certainly a minimum that is warranted.

I want to thank all of you for coming today. And as we move through this, depending how long I stay here or I don't really drink margaritas, but—

[Laughter.]

Mr. GILCHREST. —a cup of coffee and a piece of apple pie in the backyard is always nice. But I do want to partner with each of you to, over the next couple of months, set some goals so that we can all focus, in a partnership way, and understand that each of us is in a position where we are not only challenged, but unlike most Americans, we have an extraordinary opportunity to actually do something about the things that millions of people can only talk about. And so I would like to partner with each of you over the next few months, certainly before the end of this first session, to set some goals for ourselves and work out a strategy to complete the task.

[A statement submitted for the record by the Defenders of Wildlife follows:]

Statement of Noah Matson, Refuge Program Manager, Defenders of Wildlife

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife's 430,00 members and supporters nationwide, I appreciate the Committee's interest in these important issues facing the National Wildlife Refuge System. Defenders of Wildlife has been a long-time advocate for the Refuge System. The 1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Refuge Improvement Act) was a turning point for the Refuge System and represents Congress's commitment to this great system of lands. Defenders has been closely following the implementation of the promises made to the American people by the Refuge Improvement Act.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is one of our nation's most impressive achievements, maintaining America's proud wildlife legacy for present and future

generations. Increasingly, this incredible system of lands is hampered in carrying out its mission by its limited budget. Funding issues are not new to the Refuge System, in fact early in the history of the Refuge System, private organizations actually paid the salaries of refuge managers. Half a century later, the 1978 National Wildlife Refuge Study Task Force recognized that refuges suffered from “a long-standing problem of [inadequate] funding and manpower.”¹ While Congress has recognized these funding issues and has been generous with appropriations in recent years, more progress must be made.

National Wildlife Refuges are becoming increasingly important as strongholds of wildlife habitat as 3 million acres of land are consumed by development every year.² At the same time, the public is demanding more recreational opportunities on our public lands, including refuges. Refuges which had been able to get by with a handful of staff and surplus U.S. Army equipment are being strained by these growing pressures.

Increasing funding for the Refuge System is essential for implementing the Refuge Improvement Act which provides a mechanism for dealing with these pressures. The Refuge System centennial in 2003 presents an unprecedented opportunity to accomplish this goal.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFUGE IMPROVEMENT ACT: FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has taken its new responsibilities under the Refuge Improvement Act seriously. Since passage of the Refuge Improvement Act, the FWS has issued final a Refuge Planning Policy, final Compatibility Regulations and Policy, and a final Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health Policy. In addition, currently available for public comment are draft policies on Appropriate Use, Wilderness Stewardship, Mission Goals, General Recreation, and individual policies for the six priority public uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife photography and observation, and environmental education and interpretation. These are sound policies grounded in science and refuge law that provide clear direction to refuge managers, and the FWS should be commended for its efforts crafting them.

Perhaps the most important avenue for implementing the Refuge Improvement Act is the mandated Comprehensive Conservation Planning (CCP) process. The FWS has taken a number of steps towards developing CCPs. The FWS issued its final Refuge Planning Policy in May of 2000 which will improve the quality and consistency of CCPs. In August, 2000, the FWS convened the first ever meeting of refuge planners at the National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia. This meeting was a huge success, bringing planners together to share ideas and experiences and to learn about changes in national policy and from others outside the FWS, including planners from other federal land management agencies. Planning is new to the FWS, and this type of interaction and learning is imperative to continually evaluate progress and improve the planning process.

The CCP process currently underway by the FWS is the first systematic planning effort ever conducted by the Refuge System and is the main avenue for implementation of the 1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Refuge Improvement Act). Planning is the cornerstone of sound wildlife and land stewardship, and the other federal land management agencies have been planning for some time. Congress recognized this when crafting the Refuge Improvement Act and provided clear direction for the FWS when preparing CCPs. The FWS is to manage each refuge with an approved CCP that is consistent with the Refuge Improvement Act and which identifies (A) the purposes of each refuge; (B) the distribution, migration patterns, and abundance of fish, wildlife, and plant populations and related habitats within the planning unit; (C) the archaeological and cultural values of the planning unit; (D) such areas within the planning unit that are suitable for use as administrative sites or visitor facilities; (E) significant problems that may adversely affect the populations and habitats of fish, wildlife, and plants within the planning unit and the actions necessary to correct or mitigate such problems; and (F) opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses. Additionally, the FWS is to actively involve the public in the development of CCPs.

¹National Wildlife Refuge Study Task Force, *Recommendations on the Management of the National Wildlife Refuge System*. 1978. Quoted in: Fink, R.J. 1994. *The National Wildlife Refuges: Theory, Practice, and Prospect*. The Harvard Environmental Law Review. Volume 18 (1).

²U.S. EPA. *Our Built and Natural Environments, A Technical Review of the Interactions between Land Use, Transportation and Environmental Quality*. EPA 231-R-00-005, November 2000.

Since passage of the Refuge Improvement Act, 22 CCPs have been completed. Defenders of Wildlife has visited and submitted comments to many of these refuges. While each of these plans and the planning processes that led to them could be improved, all support the mission of the Refuge System. All of the plans completed outline the many ecosystem management activities refuges are engaged in. These ecosystem management activities vary widely depending on the size and biological, administrative and social context surrounding the refuge. For example, the very establishment of Little River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Oklahoma and Pond Creek NWR in Arkansas contribute to ecosystem wide goals of protecting and restoring declining bottomland hardwood forests. Most refuges work very closely with other federal and state agencies to accomplish their purposes. A.R.M. Loxahatchee NWR in Florida has developed a very close relationship with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District to manage water levels in the refuge balancing the needs of wildlife, the Everglades Agricultural Area, and the growing urban areas of southeast Florida. Many refuges work closely with volunteering landowners to further the needs of wildlife. Florida Panther NWR is coordinating ecosystem restoration projects within their watershed using a variety of federal cost-share and wetland protection programs.

These plans have improved refuge management and raised the visibility of the individual refuges in their communities. The next generation of plans will build on the successes and failures of the first round of CCPs.

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE NEEDS

Under current funding levels, the FWS will not be able to complete quality CCPs in time for its statutory deadline of 2012. CCPs take time, personnel, and money to compile essential background information, hold public meetings, synthesize input from the public and other government agencies, develop alternatives and draft plans, and physically print draft and final plans.

The time and personnel demands of planning must also be viewed in the context of the funding issues for refuges in general. The FWS estimates that their efforts to develop CCPs for Fiscal Year 2001 will cost \$8.3 million, yet FWS only received \$4.5 million dedicated to the CCP process. Funding shortfalls have led to many refuges lacking essential staff, forcing refuge personnel to assume the duties of multiple positions; dedicating them to writing a CCP takes them away from other important refuge functions. At the same time, key refuge staff, particularly the manager, need to be involved in their own CCP.

The CCP requirements of the Refuge Improvement Act are important for refuge management. One would think that the requirement to identify and describe "the distribution, migration patterns, and abundance of fish, wildlife, and plant populations and related habitats within the planning unit" would be readily available for every wildlife refuge. Yet even with its "wildlife first", science-based mission, not every refuge has a biologist. Even on refuges with a biologist on staff, the biologist may spend a large amount of time doing maintenance activities because of other staff shortages. A survey of refuges from the early 1990's found that only 60% of refuges have inventories of birds, and for other groups of species the numbers are less than 30%. Without knowledge of the status, trends, and responses to management of biological systems, refuges cannot effectively plan for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants.

The FWS "wildlife-first" mandate clearly necessitates the above shortcomings being addressed. Refuges are also important for wildlife-dependent recreation and education, and the Refuge Improvement Act clearly states that these uses should be facilitated when compatible with a refuge's purpose and the mission of the System. A refuge cannot effectively plan and manage these uses, however, without essential information on what values the public places on the refuge, and the demographic, social, political, and economic context. Nor can a refuge properly manage uses without fully understanding their impacts on refuge resources.

Increasing the operations budget for the Refuge System will help alleviate many of the above management issues and will have a direct impact on the ability of the FWS to complete quality CCPs. A concern has been raised about the potential for CCPs to generate more refuge operations projects, which will increase the backlog and needs. CCPs are intended to comprehensively evaluate refuge management to ensure that refuges are fulfilling their purposes, the mission of the System, and other statutory duties. Because of chronic funding shortfalls, many refuges will likely identify glaring needs during the CCP process to fulfill these duties. This should be viewed as a benefit of the CCP process, not a concern, because planning will ultimately improve refuge management to fulfill the promises that have been made to

the American people to have a Refuge System that protects and maintains our wildlife heritage and exposes the public to the many values wildlife have in our society.

Lack of funding for planning has created staffing shortages at the regional level, as well, which is creating a backload of planning work. All CCPs must go through the regional level for input, editing, and approval. Delays at this stage in the process not only frustrate field personnel, but the public loses faith in the planning process as the plan seems to disappear for months or even a year.

After participating in the CCP process, the public has expectations for how refuges are managed. Several refuge managers who have completed CCPs have said that the public has asked why the projects in the plan aren't being carried out and expressed frustration, anger, and disappointment that the refuge hadn't made it more clear that the projects were contingent on funding. Not being able to carry out its CCPs is a huge credibility problem for the FWS. Again, CCPs are designed to ensure that refuges are fulfilling their obligations. The CCPs completed to date are not pie in the sky plans filled with excessive funding requests for pet projects - they outline the refuges' goals based on their statutory duties and what they need to carry out those goals.

CONCLUSION

The National Wildlife Refuge System is playing an increasingly important role in protecting and restoring America's wildlife and wildlife habitat and in exposing the public to our wildlife heritage. Increased funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System is an investment in our wildlife heritage.

Defenders of Wildlife thanks the committee for holding this hearing and is encouraged that the needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System are generating such interest.

Mr. GILCHREST. Thank you all very much. The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:53 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

