

Statement of Don Barry
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For the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Interior
On the Fiscal Year 2008 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill
April 19, 2007

Mr. Chairman, The Wilderness Society (TWS) would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide recommendations and comments on the Fiscal Year 2008 Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. On behalf of the more than 250,000 members and supporters of TWS, a 70-year-old organization dedicated to preserving America's last remaining wild places. Adequate funding for the programs discussed below is vital to protect America's wild areas and environmental values.

Land and Water Conservation Fund: The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is our nation's premiere tool to create and preserve parks, forests, wildlife refuges and open space. Unfortunately, the Administration's proposed FY 08 budget provides only \$58 million for LWCF's core programs – funding federal land acquisition at \$ 22.5 million and eliminating the stateside assistance grants completely. National treasures from the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument and Long Island near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness to our neighborhood parks will suffer unless funding is increased for the LWCF program.

We urge the Subcommittee to provide \$220 million for federal land acquisition and \$100 million for stateside assistance grants in FY08, and to make a commitment to fully fund these programs at the authorized level of \$900 million annually in the coming years. Funding in the President's Budget for National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service land acquisition is cut from a proposed \$130 million in FY 2006 to \$58 million proposed for FY 2008. Americans have long relied on federal land acquisition to protect and complete its parks, forests and refuges. The Administration's cuts would result in degraded lands and fewer recreation experiences.

We recommend LWCF federal land acquisition funding for 49 priority projects for FY 2008, listed in Appendix A. Federal acquisition of these lands is necessary to avert immediate and permanent environmental damage, and to protect and restore wildlands of significance (e.g. those with rare ecosystems, endangered species, and/or other special qualities).

Forest Legacy: We urge the subcommittee to allocate \$100 million for the Forest Legacy program. The Forest Legacy program is a popular and effective means to combat the conversion of privately-owned timberlands to development. According to the recent USDA Forest Service report, "Forests on the edge," over 40 million acres of private forestlands are likely to be developed in the next three decades, threatening critical water and other ecological resources. In FY 2008, 41 states submitted 82 projects totaling \$192 million in need from Forest Legacy. Despite these enormous needs, the President's budget proposed only \$29 million for 14 projects, leaving many forests at risk. Funding to the Forest Legacy program must rise to respond to these increasing development pressures and better meet demand from participating states.

Fish and Wildlife Service: National wildlife refuges throughout the country face a crippling \$2.5 billion budget backlog. A restructuring of the Refuge System workforce cut national staffing levels 20 percent and eliminated 565 essential employees. Nearly \$800 million annually is needed to fully fund the Refuge System, but for FY 08 President Bush requested a mere \$396 million. This amount fails to factor-in inflation costs and falls \$55 million short of the amount needed to keep pace with current needs. As a step toward full funding of the Refuge System, we urge the Subcommittee to appropriate \$451.5 for Fiscal Year 2008.

National Park Service: We support increased funding for operations of the National Park System at \$206 million over the enacted FY07 funding level. Investing in interpretation, enforcement, and natural resource protection staff is critical in order for the agency to provide visitors with safe, enjoyable, and educational experiences in the park system. We continue to have serious concerns about the growing backlog on critical systems deferred maintenance which has reached over \$1 billion according to the agency as well as a significant back log for land acquisition needs. A crumbling infrastructure will only get worse over time. We strongly recommend a larger investment in the maintenance backlog than the Administration's proposal.

Forest Service Open Space Preservation: The Forest Service has identified the loss of open space as one of the four major threats to forests across our nation. The U.S. loses approximately 6000 acres of open spaces and forests every day (the equivalent of 240 football fields per hour). These are fish and wildlife habitats, the sources of clean water, and places where Americans recreate. In addition to funding programs like Forest Legacy and LWCF, which aid in the acquisition and protection of open spaces, other programs within the Forest Service also aid in protecting our open spaces and require funding adjustments. We urge that the Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management program receive \$160 million, Recreation, Heritage, & Wilderness program receive \$64 million for Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers, Road Maintenance be increased to \$500 million to address the maintenance backlog and to decommission roads that cannot be sustainably maintained, and **Urban and Community Forestry receive at least the FY2006 funding levels of \$57 million**. Reducing timber funding levels to the FY2000 level of \$237 million and reducing the construction and reconstruction funding for new logging roads would also prevent the degradation of wildlife habitat, soils, streams and recreation sites and aid in the protection of open spaces.

Forest Service Wildfire Management: The Wilderness Society believes there are two key actions that can address the escalating cost of suppressing wildland fires: expanding Wildland Fire Use (WFU) and increasing funding for the community fire assistance program. We urge Congress to provide increased resources specifically for WFU training and staffing and increase funding for State Fire Assistance to \$145 million to meet projected needs for local communities throughout the country.

BLM's Oil and Gas Program: We support the Administration's proposal to repeal provisions of Sec. 365 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and the \$3.1 million request for inspection and monitoring. However, any allocations for this purpose should be accompanied by a clear directive that such funds be used *solely* for inspection and enforce activities, and not be diverted to other uses, such as processing drilling permit applications, as has been the case in recent years.

The BLM's oil and gas program budget has ballooned from \$57.8 million in FY 2000 to a record \$121.2 million request for FY 2008, a more than doubling in appropriations for this program during a period when overall appropriations for the BLM's conservation programs have either stagnated or declined. Despite the fact that about 24 million acres of leased public lands are idle, the BLM continues to issue new leases to industry on demand, often in environmentally sensitive areas, some of which have been proposed by Members of Congress for Wilderness designation. We recommend that this overall request be reduced by \$15 million and the savings be used to cover other BLM programs that are badly in need of funding, such as the National Landscape Conservation System and the "Healthy Lands Initiative."

The Committee should demand from the BLM more information about the "Healthy Lands Initiative"—for example, how much money will be spent on what activities over how long a period of time. Since a major rationale for the "Healthy Lands Initiative" is to address the damage that has occurred to public lands as a result of oil and gas activities, the Committee should insist on precise information from the BLM about what the industry's responsibilities are for preventing damage to wildlife, fisheries, and other environmental values, and to what extent the industry will be held responsible for financing the clean-up and restoration efforts that are needed. Sufficient funds should also be allocated to the National Academy of Sciences to complete the coal bed methane water study authorized in Sec. 1811 of the Energy Policy Act, but which heretofore the BLM has refused to fund.

Oil shale: We urge the Committee to adopt language to prohibit the BLM from developing a commercial oil shale lease program in FY 2008. The BLM has recently issued a number of research and development oil shale leases however, the results of this program will not be known for several years. Nevertheless, the BLM intends to finalize commercial oil shale regulations by the end of this year, and issue commercial leases by the end of calendar year 2008. The BLM should await the results of the R&D programs of its various lessees, take into account the results of that program, incorporate the relevant knowledge into its regulatory program, and only then decide whether it is prudent to offer commercial oil shale leases.

BLM and Forest Service Land Sales: The Administration has once again proposed to sell BLM and Forest Service lands for "deficit reduction" and other purposes. This proposal is virtually identical to the Administration's proposal last year, which was not accepted by the Committee. We urge the subcommittee to reject this proposal again this year.

National Landscape Conservation System: We urge the committee to provide \$69 million in FY08 for operations and maintenance, to conserve the unique National Monuments, National Trails, and other areas that comprise the 26 million acre System. This modest increase in funding will help address priority unmet needs including additional rangers, investments in monitoring and restoration, cultural site protection, and volunteer program support. We also ask the committee to support member requests for Conservation System units in their districts. To promote accountability, we urge the committee to request expenditure and accomplishment reports for each of the System's Monuments and Conservation Areas for FY07 and inclusion of unit-level allocations by major sub-activities for all System units but Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). These unit-level allocations should be combined with Wilderness and WSAs under a new System activity account.

Table A: Recommended Federal LWCF Projects for FY 2008

State	Project Name	Amount
AL	Alabama National Forests	\$1,800,000
AR	Ouachita National Forest	\$1,500,000
AZ	San Pedro National Conservation Area(rail-trail)	\$500,000
CA	Sierra Nevada Checkerboard	\$2,500,000
CA	Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument	4,200,000
CO	Uncompahgre National Forest(Ophir Valley)	\$2,500,000
CO	Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area	\$856,000
CO	Canyons of the Ancients National Monument	\$7,000,000
CT	Stewart McKinney National Wildlife Refuge(Menunketesuck)	\$710,000
CT	Highlands Conservation Act	\$2,500,000
CT	Silvio Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge	\$3,250,000
GA	Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area(Hyde Farm NPS portion of project)	\$5,000,000
GA--	Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests- Riparian Project (USFS portion of project)	\$4,000,000
KY	Cumberland Gap National Historic Park(Fern Lake)	\$1,900,000
LA	Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge(Brazilier)	\$3,000,000
LA	Tensas National Wildlife Refuge(Chicago Mill)	\$500,000
MA	Cape Cod NS	\$4,000,000
MA	Silvio Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge	\$4,000,000
ME	White Mountain National Forest(Haystack Notch)	\$550,000
MI	Ottawa National Forest(Sturgeon River Gorge)	\$4,000,000
MN	Superior National Forest(Long Island)	\$1,500,000
MT	Flathead National Forest	\$8,000,000
MT	Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (Sun Ranch)	\$4,500,000
NC	Uwharrie National Scenic Trail	\$800,000
NC	Appalachian National Scenic Recreation Trail,	\$270,000
NH	Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge(Mollidgewock)	\$1,000,000
NH	Silvio Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge	\$1,230,000
NJ	E.B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge	\$1,375,000
NJ	Delaware Water Gap(Minisink Bluffs)	\$1,200,000
NJ	Highlands Conservation Act	\$2,500,000
NM	La Cienega ACEC	\$3,000,000
NY	Highlands Conservation Act	\$2,500,000
OH	Cuyahoga National Park	\$8,000,000
OR	Rogue WSR(Winkle Bar)	\$1,500,000
OR	Cascade Siskiyou National Monument	1,800,000
OR	Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area	1,800,000
PA	Delaware Water Gap(Santos Farm)	\$4,000,000
PA	Highlands Conservation Act	\$2,500,000
TN	Rocky Fork	\$7,000,000
TN	Chickamauga Chattanooga NMP	\$2,200,000
TN	Appalachian National Scenic Recreation Trail,	\$500,000
TX	Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge	\$275,000
TX	San Bernard NWR	3,000,000
VI	Virgin Islands National Park(Maho)	\$4,500,000
VT	Silvio Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge	\$261,000
VT	Green Mountain National Forest	\$2,883,000
WA	Mt. Ranier (Carbon River)	\$1,500,000
WA	Central Cascades (Dandy Pass)	\$1,925,000
WI	Chequamegon National Forest	\$6,200,000
Total		\$129,487,500

