

**Testimony of Brian Nesvik
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Department of the Interior
Before the
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
On the
President's FY 2027 Budget Request**

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Good morning, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and members of the Committee. I am Brian Nesvik, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) within the Department of the Interior (Department). Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of President Trump's Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget request for the Service.

The Service is the primary agency in the federal government statutorily charged to manage fish and wildlife for the American public and is the country's oldest federal conservation agency, with roots extending back to 1871. Today the Service plays a crucial role in fostering a healthy environment and providing opportunities for Americans to experience the outdoors. The Service's approach emphasizes its role as a good neighbor, aligning closely with the Department's strategic goals, objectives, and priorities. The Service is committed to partnership and cooperative actions to achieve better outcomes for and service to the American public.

President Trump's budget outlines a request for \$1.3 billion in discretionary funding for the Service in FY27 and presents new opportunities for a future driven by innovation dedicated to optimizing sustainable use of our natural resources with an emphasis on supporting an economy bolstered by our rich natural resources. It also reflects our commitment to delivering superior service to the American people through a workforce dedicated to delivering on our commitments and responsibilities to the American public as efficiently as possible. This budget supports President Trump's America First priorities, including energy development, effective and efficient implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), stewardship of and access to public lands and waters, and continued infrastructure investment.

Energy Development and Effective Implementation of the ESA

In line with President Trump's leadership, the Service's FY27 budget request reflects a proactive approach to energy development on federal lands and waters while ensuring the conservation of our natural environment. A key to unleashing American energy dominance is effective and efficient implementation of the ESA. The Service's FY27 budget proposes an increase of \$5.1 million to reduce the time for environmental review under the ESA for energy projects. With this funding, the Service expects to accelerate the review of energy plans and projects that support the Administration's priorities, as outlined in *Executive Order (EO) 14154, Unleashing American Energy*; *EO 14156, Declaring a National Energy Emergency*; *Secretarial Order (SO) 3417, Addressing the National Energy Emergency*; and *SO 3418, Unleashing American Energy*. The Service anticipates reducing informal ESA section 7 consultation timeframes from 30 to 14 days for projects covered under the programmatic tools and implemented through the Service's

Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC). Similarly, the Service anticipates reducing formal ESA section 7 consultation timeframes from that allowed by statute (135 days) to no more than 30 days for projects covered under the programmatic tools and implemented through IPaC.

Another major goal of the Administration is recovering and delisting species listed under the ESA. The Service's FY27 budget request includes a \$2.6 million increase for work to support this effort, including development of recovery plans, five-year status reviews, and rulemakings to downlist or delist species whose status has improved. At the requested FY27 funding level, the Service expects to propose or finalize 15 delisting or downlisting rules. The increased funding will also expand the Service's capacity to work with other Department bureaus, federal agencies, states, tribes and other stakeholders, to ensure recovery plans have firm objective and measurable recovery criteria and address five-year status review recommendations on the national workplan and actually progress towards delisting a species. The Service's FY27 budget request also includes a \$19.7 million increase for priority recovery activities including implementation of a new multi-year recovery prioritization initiative to catalyze and support high priority activities outlined in Service recovery plans for priority species. These funds will be allocated to proposals that have the highest likelihood to achieve de-listing or downlisting of a priority species.

The budget also includes a request for the resources and authority to integrate the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Office of Protected Resources (OPR) and associated ESA and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) implementation responsibilities into the Service to streamline permitting activities and ensure consistency in ESA and MMPA implementation. Consolidation of NMFS and the Service will improve the efficiency of ESA implementation by ensuring that only one agency needs to review activities that potentially impact endangered species. This merger streamlines ESA implementation and facilitates more effective and efficient management of our land and water resources while decreasing costs over time.

Stewardship and Access to Public Lands and Waters

The Service proudly operates the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), which is among the world's most significant land and water systems dedicated to the conservation of fish and wildlife and to providing quality outdoor opportunities for the public. The proposed budget reflects a strong commitment to enhancing these vital ecosystems, which have provided high quality habitat for native species and unparalleled outdoor experiences for all Americans since 1903.

The Service's FY27 budget aligns directly with Presidential and Secretarial priorities to enhance Americans' access to public lands and foster outdoor recreational activities, including *EO 14313, Establishing the President's Make America Beautiful Again Commission* and *SO 3447, Expanding Hunting and Fishing Access, Removing Unnecessary Barriers, and Ensuring Consistency Across the Department of the Interior Lands and Waters*. Each year, millions visit national wildlife refuges, contributing significantly to local economies and the booming outdoor recreation industry in America.

In May, the Service proposed opening or expanding more than 1,450 new hunting and fishing opportunities in 32 states. This proposed expansion, the largest in the history of the Service,

would make more than 95 percent of Refuge System lands available for hunting and reinforces the Trump Administration's commitment to outdoor recreation, conservation and rural economic growth. The Service's FY27 budget will support effective implementation of these new opportunities.

With a focus on expanding and enhancing hunting and fishing opportunities for all Americans the budget includes an increase of \$2.5 million for visitor services at wildlife refuges. This funding increase will enable the Service to better support gateway communities, ensure continued support for *SO 3435, Implementation of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act* and facilitate high-quality recreational opportunities through increased access. This investment emphasizes the role of hunting and fishing activities as the backbone of the North American model of wildlife conservation, which is admired globally.

To provide safety and security for the visiting public, the budget supports Federal Wildlife Officers that are charged with protecting refuge resources, but also are involved with local and other federal law enforcement agencies in cooperative efforts to combat drug trafficking, address border security issues, and aid in other security challenges. The FY27 budget increases funding for refuge law enforcement by \$3 million to support the retention of workforce gains, salary increases, and maintain officer-related field support.

Infrastructure Investment

As a steward for America's public lands, the Service's infrastructure projects help millions of visitors experience our national treasures, provide water to the West, and support American jobs. The FY27 budget reflects the Service's ongoing efforts to prioritize safety and accessibility while addressing important maintenance needs across various asset categories, including buildings, roads, bridges, and water management structures. This aligns closely with Secretarial and Administration priorities, simultaneously promoting conservation and economic development.

The Service's FY27 budget allocates \$113.2 million for Refuge System maintenance and \$13.7 million for new construction projects. With the Service managing over 570 national wildlife refuges and thousands of smaller wetlands, including fee title and conservation easements, across more than 150 million acres, these investments aim to address the significant deferred maintenance backlog. The Service's maintenance challenges are multifaceted, including damage from natural disasters like floods and hurricanes, as well as the development and upkeep of infrastructure in environmentally sensitive areas. Infrastructure projects support modernizing facilities and operations through new construction and rehabilitation projects, using American-made materials. The agency's lifecycle management approach to infrastructure management delivers high-quality, timely, cost-effective, and code-compliant construction projects.

The President's FY27 budget also proposes reauthorizing President Trump's Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) at \$1.9 billion annually for 5 years. Through the GAOA LRF, the Department invests in assets and infrastructure so visitors can safely enjoy public lands and employees are able to work efficiently and effectively. Reauthorization of GAOA will allow the Service to continue utilizing life-cycle efficient methods to address priority deferred maintenance needs through infrastructure repair, replacement, and divestiture. Infrastructure investments under a reauthorized LRF will enhance

operational efficiency and public safety, improve recreation access and service delivery, reduce liabilities associated with deferred maintenance, and help ensure that facilities on public lands meet the needs of visitors and communities.

In conclusion, the Service's FY27 budget is about putting America first and delivering for the American people. It reflects our commitment to innovation, customer service, energy development, streamlined regulatory processes, enhanced recreational opportunities, stewardship of our public lands, and infrastructure investment. Through President Trump's leadership, the Service is working to ensure that our country's rich natural resources are available for today's Americans and for future generations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.