



**Written Statement of The Wilderness Society  
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Public Witness Day on Non-Tribal Issues  
April 23, 2009**

The Wilderness Society (TWS) represents more than 400,000 members and supporters across the U.S. who support our mission to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places. We thank the committee for the opportunity to submit comments on the Fiscal Year 2010 Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Over the last two years, federal allocations reversed the near decade-long pattern of severe funding cuts to numerous conservation programs. We applaud Congress for increasing appropriations for essential public land conservation activities, but despite this progress, these and other indispensable conservation programs continue to suffer from years of underfunding.

To make matters worse, the effects of climate change are already being felt on public lands nationwide. Protection of these lands help buffer flooding and wildfire, conserve water, support healthy fisheries and wildlife populations, limit sea-level rise and the spread of invasives, and aide in carbon storage.

The President has sent a strong message to Congress by supporting a budget that assumes the passage of a cap-auction-and-trade climate protection program. The revenues generated from this program should be invested in the public welfare, including the protection of biodiverse ecosystems that protect our public health. It is too late to prevent climate disruption, because the pollution dumped into the air for the past 100 years will affect us for the next 100, guaranteeing an increase in severe climate events related to global warming.

However, it is not too late to secure the public protection that comes from keeping our watersheds functioning and our air filtered by resilient natural landscapes. According to the US Forest Service, we are losing 6000 acres a day of forested and open space. These intact forest systems are a weapon against the ravages of global warming, and we should protect them the way an army protects the armory. To build resilient landscapes, we must keep them from being broken apart, fragmented, disconnected and degraded. Accordingly, we urge that you take bold, immediate action in making additional investments for Fiscal Year 2010. As a minimum step toward adequate funding of our public land programs and to meet new challenges associated with climate change, TWS recommends:

**Land and Water Conservation Fund**

Our 682 million acres of federal land and waterways provide a critical opportunity to address the unprecedented challenges that climate change poses to our forests, fish and wildlife, and riparian resources. The strategic acquisition of key inholdings, buffer areas, and wildlife migration corridors within and adjacent to existing public lands enhances adaptation efforts and fosters intact landscapes. These natural areas also store carbon, buffer flooding, conserve water, and support

healthy fisheries and wildlife populations. Hand-in-hand with mitigating the deleterious impacts of our environment from burning fossil fuels is the need to respond to climate change with a foresighted investment in land protection and natural resource adaptation across the federal public lands. President Obama has indicated that LWCF should be fully funded by 2014, and we support a significant funding increase that will lead to his goal. *TWS' FY 10 recommendation for the LWCF is \$450 million (\$325 million for federal and \$125 million for stateside), an increase of \$278.1 million over FY 09 enacted level of \$171.9 million. We also support conserving land and natural resources in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania through the Highlands Conservation Act.*

#### **A Sampling of TWS LWCF and Forest Legacy Acquisition Priorities for FY 10**

- AR - Maumelle Water Excellence. Forest Legacy Request: \$3.6 million
- CA - Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. LWCF Request: \$1.5 million
- GA - Chattahoochee River NRA. LWCF Request: \$3.1 million
- MD - Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. LWCF Request: \$2.0 million
- MT - Red Rocks Lake National Wildlife Refuge. LWCF Request: \$1.0 million
- NC - Pisgah National Forest; Uwarrie National Forest. LWCF Request: \$2.0 million
- NH - Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge. LWCF Request: \$5.0 million
- NM - Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. LWCF Request: \$2.0 million
- OR - Cascade Siskiyou National Monument. LWCF Request: \$4.0 million
- SC - Congaree National Park. LWCF Request: \$2.7 million
- TN - Rocky Fork, 10,000 acres located along the Appalachian Trail Corridor on the NC-TN line. LWCF Request: \$13.5 million; North Cumberland Conservation Area. Forest Legacy Request: \$9.0 million
- WA - Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. LWCF Request: \$1.7 million; Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest. LWCF Request: \$250,000

#### **Forest Legacy and Community Forest & Open Space Program**

The Forest Legacy Program helps to preserve working forestlands threatened by conversion/development. To date, this program has protected over 1.7 million acres in 36 states and Puerto Rico. A total of \$381 million of federal funds have been matched by \$484 million in non-federal funds and donations, making the federal share only 44 percent of overall project costs. FLP funding has steadily diminished from a height of \$69 million in Fiscal Year 2003, while demand for funding has steadily increased. For Fiscal Year 2010, the USFS received 84 project proposals from 44 states and territories to protect 288,530 acres with a total project value of over \$363 million. *TWS' recommendation for FY 10 is that the Forest Legacy Program be funded at \$125 million.*

The Forest Service has begun its rulemaking process for the Community Forest and Open Space Program (CFOSP) and the public comment period will begin in May, to be finalized by September. This new program will enable communities to conserve thousands of forested acres, thereby maintaining carbon sequestration and storage where otherwise development might have occurred. *TWS' FY 10 recommendation for CFOSP is \$75 million for this program's first year.*

#### **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**

Over the past eight years, BLM's budget has been unbalanced in its emphasis on oil and gas development, while other program areas have been shortchanged. We hope that in FY 2010 Congress will start to address this imbalance by appropriating a larger proportion of the BLM's budget for its environmental stewardship programs, rather than its oil and gas program.

We hope that the new Administration will review and revise the policies governing the BLM's oil and gas leasing program to better ensure that sensitive lands and resources that have been put at risk by the previous administration's irresponsible development policies are better protected from the damage that irresponsible oil and gas activities can wreak on the environment. We also hope that the Administration will direct the Bureau to take into account the impacts of its management decisions on climate change.

### **BLM's National Landscape Conservation System**

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) National Landscape Conservation System currently comprises some 26 million acres of congressionally and presidentially designated lands and waters, such as National Monuments and National Conservation Areas. Stewardship of the System's many units provides jobs for thousands of Americans while supporting vibrant and sustainable economies in surrounding communities. The System provides immeasurable public values in return for modest investments: outstanding recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, clean water, wilderness, and open space near fast-growing cities, just to name a few. The Conservation System also provides a living laboratory where the challenges of climate change can be studied and landscape level habitat restoration can take place. Investments today will not only help maintain and enhance these critical landscapes but also provide for numerous volunteer and jobs opportunities that are needed today and cost effective in the long-term. The System's budget has suffered from neglect since its inception since 2000, but recent congressional increases are helping address backlogs; however, additional funding is critical to restore landscapes and protect resources from neglect, and damage. Recent changes to the System's budget have improved clarity in the System's budget, but the System still suffers from a lack of prominence in the Bureau's budget structure. *TWS' FY 10 recommendation is full budget clarity for the Conservation System and funding of \$75 million, a modest increase of \$14.2 million over the FY 09 enacted level.*

### **National Park System**

Our National Park System is comprised of 391 units that represent our nation's wondrous and diverse natural and cultural resources. Increased funding is essential to ensure that these historic and ecologically important sites provide invaluable visitor experiences and thrive as wild landscapes adapting to a changing climate. The American Recovery and Investment Act allocated \$750 million to the National Park Service to protect these national icons, and the President's budget recommends an increase of \$100 million for operations to protect this investment and help further reduce the System's multi-billion dollar maintenance backlog. In addition, the President has requested \$25 million to help prepare the National Park Service for its centennial anniversary in 2016. These funds are critical to both the immediate needs and sustainable future of these public lands.

### **National Wildlife Refuge System**

The National Wildlife Refuge System, with its 549 refuges on nearly 150 million acres of land, helps protect critical wildlife habitat, ensuring that wildlife protection remains a priority of these lands. There is a wildlife refuge in every state and within an hour's drive of most American cities. More than 35 million people visit refuges annually, generating nearly \$1.7 billion for local economies and supporting almost 27,000 private sector jobs. Last year's operations and maintenance appropriation increase brought funding to a level that is close to what the Refuge System needed to keep pace with inflation costs over the past five years. This significant investment helped stem severe staff losses and program cuts. But years of stagnant funding fueled a spiraling backlog of \$3.5 billion in operations and maintenance projects and a loss of more than 300 positions since 2004. The Refuge System needs \$765 million in annual funds to adequately

address its operations and maintenance needs of the Refuge System. *TWS' FY 10 recommendation for the Refuge System is the same as last year's request of \$514 million.*

### **Wildland Fire**

TWS is pleased that congress is recognizing that past borrowing from other agency programs for wildland fire suppression has caused project cancellations, strained relationships with partners, and disruptions in management. Additionally, we are encouraged by the introduction of the FLAME bill which is an important first step in addressing the increasing costs of suppression while helping to stave off large transfers from other agency programs. FLAME Act would establish a framework for the administration's proposed contingency fund for emergency wildfires. The next steps include short and long-term solutions for suppression cost containment. TWS recommends appropriators retire the use of the 10-year average in accounting for annual suppression costs and use a scientifically-based predictive model, to include climate change as a factor, for suppression estimates. Additionally, appropriators are encouraged to provide funding to train firefighters to manage wildfires. A one percent increase in Preparedness allocated to firefighter training would arm wildland firefighter with a full range of tactical response expertise from monitoring to aggressive attack, which will lead to healthier landscapes and reduce suppression costs in the future. TWS is pleased that the administration has also recognized the need to fund State Fire Assistance at levels that would effectively help communities reduce their wildfire risk and we recommend congress support that proposal.

### **National Forest System and Capital Improvement & Maintenance**

TWS recommends congress revise the Forest Service annual appropriations to reduce commodity production and increase funding for programs that will strengthen forests to mitigate the effects of climate change including: \$77.9 million for Forest Inventory Analysis to effectively track changes in forest health due to climate stresses and changes in management; \$377 million for Recreation, Wilderness & Heritage (including \$84.1 million for Travel Management Planning); \$197.4 million for Wildlife & Fish Habitat Management; \$325 million for Road Maintenance for maintenance of roads that have completed a roads analysis; and \$100 million for Legacy Roads & Trails Remediation program for decommissioning projects that improve water quality and fish habitat. Finally, we urge congress to advise the agency to undergo a comprehensive review of GAO and OIG recommendations on maintaining an evolving and effective accounting program based on accurate data collection, storage and reporting in order to increase FS budget and project transparency.

### **U.S. Climate Reserve**

According to the Forest Service, we are losing the equivalent of two Rhode Island's worth of open space a year. Some of this occurs on public lands. Our diminishing old-growth and mature forests need to be viewed as a national treasure of carbon storage. The U.S. Climate Reserve needs to be nurtured and enhanced, both as a carbon sink and as a storehouse of other ecosystem services on which we rely. But we need to provide incentives for private landowners as well, because 60 percent of our nation's forests are privately-owned. If we are to mitigate the threat of climate change, we need to recognize the public service provided by every private landowner who is willing to protect his forest from development, require sustainable practices when harvesting, and protect watersheds with replanting and riparian buffer zones. From Wilderness designation to wetland banking, we need a truly national strategy to stop the galloping destruction of our existing carbon stocks that begins with the recognition that our forests are weapons in the fight against global warming and should be protected.