

Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies 2012
Talking Points for Regional Director Tom Melius
June 26, 2012, Wichita, KS

- Good morning. Thank you, Dan. And thank you to the entire Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies including all of our state and federal partners here with us today. I am honored to be part of this conservation community.
- I'd like to address several topics of prime importance to the Fish and Wildlife Service in the Midwest Region including the challenges we currently face, and the successes we have achieved that give us the credibility and confidence to meet those challenges head on.
- As in previous years, the threat of Asian carp to the Great Lakes remains a serious natural resources challenge.
- It gives me great pleasure to announce that after helping to collect more than 59,000 fish during sampling in 2011, we did not find a single bighead or silver carp in Chicago's waterways that connect to the Great Lakes.

- But our work continues with additional research and monitoring below, in, and above the electric barriers in the Chicago Area Waterway System.
- We will also soon be breaking ground on a state-of-the-art environmental DNA lab in La Crosse, Wisconsin that will open late this fall. The new facility will give us the capacity to test water samples for the presence of Asian carp DNA in the Chicago Area Waterway System and eventually across the Great Lakes.
- The threat of invasive species is not the only challenge faced by Midwest natural resources managers. Of critical concern in the Midwest Region is the impact of white nose syndrome on recovery efforts for the endangered Indiana bat.
- White nose syndrome, initially discovered in 2007 in the northeast, has since spread to bats in 19 states and four Canadian provinces, including Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri and Ohio.

- We have new confirmations of the disease further south and west than ever before, and in a seventh species in 2012, the endangered gray bat.
- Research suggests that several species of bats could become regionally extinct in the next decade should the spread of the disease continue at its current rate.
- It is critical that we continue to work collectively, to motivate each other and to work toward the common goal of meeting the immense challenge that white-nose syndrome presents.
- We are also working alongside members of the wind development industry to mitigate and minimize impacts of wind energy facilities on migratory birds, eagles, and federally listed species.

- Service biologists are working to review project proposals to examine the impacts of wind turbines on species and offer suggestions to mitigate and minimize impacts, in addition to informing and facilitating wind developer participation in Habitat Conservation Plans.
- Our commitment to working with the wind energy industry will help shape the smart siting, design, and operation of the nation's rapidly expanding wind energy operations, and promote effective communication among wind energy developers and federal and state, tribal, and local conservation agencies.
- Despite these challenges we are reminded of our successes working together on restoration and recovery for fish and wildlife across the Midwest.
- Of particular importance is the recent removal of the gray wolf in the Western Great Lakes from the list of threatened and endangered species.

- The states of Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin have been instrumental in the recovery of gray wolves in the Midwest.
- Wolf numbers total more than 4,000 animals in these three core recovery states, and each state has worked collaboratively to develop a sound management plan to ensure they remain recovered.
- We also continue to see success in our fisheries restoration efforts across the Great Lakes basin.
- In particular, we have restored Lake Superior lake trout populations to self-sustaining levels with the support of our state agency partners and funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.
- We are also well on our way to self-sustaining lake trout populations in Lake Huron, and are making progress in Lake Michigan.

- We are also improving the way we evaluate the success of our hatchery programs through mass marking.
- When fully implemented, this initiative will allow us to coded-wire-tag all hatchery stocked fish in the Great Lakes and answer key ecological questions about fish behavior and survival.
- In the midst of complex stressors to our natural resources, from invasive species and climate change to growing populations and energy needs, we must continue to work together to conserve and protect the natural resources of the Midwest.
- Dan mentioned the development of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives. These partnerships are critical to addressing these challenging issues that we all face as natural resource managers.
- We must work across agency and jurisdictional lines. LCCs are helping us do just that.

- The Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative is working to address shifting agricultural trends, loss of native grasslands, and wetland drainage that threaten the health and productivity of the nation's largest waterfowl breeding grounds.
- The Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative, which held a steering committee meeting here Sunday, is focusing its efforts on aquatic connectivity to promote the health of the Great Lakes and the watersheds of the upper Midwest.
- The Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers Landscape Conservation Cooperative, which held its first steering committee meeting this May, will be zeroing in on how to work with agricultural communities in the nation's "cornbelt" to identify practices that benefit both wildlife and local economies.
- These and many other partnerships are critical to the future of how we conduct business in the natural resources community.

- They can help us work more effectively and efficiently, with maximum return on our investments, for the benefit of fish, wildlife and their habitats and the American people.
- As many of you know, I place a high value on the federal-state partnerships that we have in the Midwest Region.
- Our Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, celebrating its 75th anniversary this year, is vital to keeping that partnership strong.
- We recently announced the selection of our new Assistant Regional Director for Migratory Birds and State Programs, David Scott from the Ohio Division of Wildlife. I am sure that Dave will work closely with each of you in this new role.
- It is a pleasure to be with you here today to talk about the natural resource issues affecting our Midwest landscape, and I look forward to our continued shared opportunities and successes in the future.