

**Talking points for Director Dan Ashe Midwest Association of Fish
and Wildlife Agencies 2012
June 26, 2012**

- Good morning. It is wonderful to be with you here in Wichita at what is such a significant time for wildlife.
- Conservation faces challenges at almost every turn – population growth, accelerating climate change, habitat fragmentation, urbanization, invasive species and water scarcity, to name just a few.
- But at the same time, we must not forget that challenges are also opportunities ... Opportunities to develop workable solutions to the challenges.
- And we have plans to turn our challenges not just into opportunities ... but into successes.

- We are facing a growing population that every day demands more water, food, fiber and fuel – and occupies more of the ecological space on the planet.
- And if they are doing more for people, then the resources will be able to do less for the plants, fish and animals that we are tasked to conserve.
- There's only so much food and cover and water in the world, and people are going to be asking for more of it.
- So we have to make some hard choices.
- No one wants any animal or plant – from the simplest grass to the most magnificent mammal – to go extinct. Extinction is forever, and every loss is a tragedy.
- But if we let ourselves be consumed with a crusade to save everything, then we'll more likely wind up saving nothing.
- Using the best scientific knowledge available, doctors perform triage to apportion their time and resources based on those who

will probably benefit from care or who would likely die despite care.

- We must do the same. And we must be willing to go where science leads us, even if it leads us to an uncomfortable place that suggests a particular species' extinction is inevitable.
- If we use the best science to focus on the most strategically important species, we can actually minimize our extinction losses and put the right kind of conservation in the right places to achieve the greatest benefit for a host of other species.
- As we all know, the sheer number of species for which the Service and states are responsible makes designing and conserving landscape-scale habitats impractical on a species-by-species basis.
- We will need to focus on a species that tells us something about the functioning of large landscapes and ecosystems. ... a surrogate species.

- “Surrogate species” is a commonly used scientific term for system-based conservation planning that uses a species as an indicator of landscape habitat and system conditions.
- Through such a planning process, the Service will work with partners through a science-based process to identify a species or other conservation planning targets that can best represent the landscape conditions and habitat needs of larger groups of species.
- If we select that surrogate species correctly, then other species will come along for the ride.
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- For instance, if we do a good job of managing for the sage grouse, 150 -200 other species that occupy the same habitat will thrive.
- We will need strong science to choose the right species.
- And our Landscape Conservation Cooperatives will help us there.

- The Service is actively nurturing a network of science-driven partnerships that will help the natural resources community better respond to landscape stressors across geographic and jurisdictional boundaries.
- LCCs bring together agencies and organizations from across the landscape to improve our scientific knowledge and create the basis for cooperative action that will have a greater impact on wildlife than we could hope to have alone.
- Our state partners have been instrumental to the growth of LCCs in the Midwest.
- State Wildlife Action Plans developed by our state agency partners have helped provide direction and guidance to help our LCCs address landscape level challenges.
- I'd like to recognize several LCC co-chairs here today— Terry Steinwand, Director of North Dakota Game and Fish Department, Marc Miller, Director of Illinois Department of Natural Resources (or John Rogner, Assistant Director of Illinois DNR), and Becky

Humphries, director of the Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office for Ducks Unlimited.

- The long-term success of these partnerships is built on your leadership and guidance as co-chairs for our Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC, Upper Midwest and Great Lakes LCC, and Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers LCC.
- LCCs across the Midwest are facilitating an open dialogue among the conservation community, and will ultimately provide us all with better tools to conserve and protect the valuable resources of our Midwest landscape.
- We need all the help we can get.
- Conservation budgets are being squeezed at all levels. We must accept that our future budgets will very likely be flat at best.
- LCCs will help us be smarter about where we put the money we do get.

- And we need strong partners at the state level, maybe now more than ever.
- Recent refuge units, like the Flint Hills, the Dakota Grasslands and the Everglades Headwaters, represent a new conservation model for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – one that will rely even more on you, our local partners.
- They are all locally supported, partnership-driven conservation efforts.
- Through voluntary partnerships with those who make their living on the land, we are working together toward a common goal of conserving the land's natural heritage and the economic value of the land.
- And with the world population and consumption growing, these kinds of partnerships with private landowners will become more vital.
- To ensure a future for wildlife, we must work on ways to keep the landscapes working for humans and wildlife both.

- We are also working with landowners and using the best science available to conserve the Prairie Potholes.
- Alongside our partners, we recently announced we will work with the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission to focus resources on wildlife habitat in the Prairie Pothole Region of the northern plains, breeding grounds for a majority of the continent's ducks.
- Under this initiative, the Service, Ducks Unlimited and other partners will work with the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission to expend upwards of 70 percent—approximately \$30 million—of the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to help secure the future for waterfowl and grassland species on the prairies.
- We used the best science to identify areas of need and areas of high duck conservation potential.
- Now we will work with willing landowners to set up easements on tens of thousands of additional acres, helping to stem the loss of these breeding grounds.
- As I said, the conservation world faces a lot of challenges, but with smart ideas like our work in the Prairie Potholes, our partnerships

with private landowners and help from our wonderful state allies, we can't lose. I look forward to talking with you about how we can turn them into successes.

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