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[60 minutes for remarks and Q&A]

**Introduction**

- Thank you so much for having me here today. It's great to be back in the beautiful Traverse City, Michigan.
- And, I'd like to thank Keith and his Michigan DNR staff for hosting us at this beautiful location.
- I'm honored to be among peers, and humbled to be able to speak to you at what I strongly believe is a pivotal time in conservation history.
- Now, more than ever, we need to find more effective ways to work together for the benefit of fish and wildlife. The choices we make here, and now, will have a profound effect on the way people experience the world for generations to come.

- The word “crisis” is often overused in our current media-driven culture. But I don’t think it’s an exaggeration to point out the multiple crises that confront us across the hemisphere.
- Rising levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere pose a threat nearly beyond calculation to the wildlife and ecosystems that support human society.
- The overwhelming consensus of the scientific community – supported by multiple observations and evidence-based climate modeling well into the future – is that these atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gasses are already beginning to trigger massive disruptions in ecosystems across the hemisphere.
- We face a crisis on the prairies, where drought and rising commodity prices threaten millions of acres of wetlands. Losing those wetlands will cause devastating declines in continental populations of waterfowl and other wildlife – while hurting local hunting-dependent economies and State conservation funding.

- We face the collapse of the Great Lakes fishery if Asian carp penetrate barriers on the Chicago River and reach Lake Michigan.
- We confront a global poaching and wildlife trafficking crisis that imperils fragile ecosystems and regional security and stability. African elephant and rhino poaching has reached unprecedented levels in the modern era, and illegal trade threatens the survival of many other iconic species.
- I'm sure you could provide dozens of other examples. But we're all asked to meet these challenges with fewer resources than ever.
- I consider the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be fortunate to escape the worst impacts from sequestration. And yet, through attrition we've lost nearly 10 percent of our workforce in the past two years. I don't doubt that things are worse at the state level.
- I've said it before, but it bears repeating: We can't continue to do business as usual. We're spread too thin, and we're losing ground.
- We have to focus our limited resources on the right species in the right places to deliver the biggest benefits for conservation.

## Surrogate Species

- With you, our most important partners, we are setting measurable objectives at landscape scales, using adaptive management principles to learn from our successes and failures.
- I hope you've been hearing from you staff about Strategic Habitat Conservation and our efforts to cooperatively implement this approach by selecting surrogate species.
- With your help and building upon previous work, such as your State Wildlife Action Plans we've made tremendous progress. And our commitment to institutionalize SHC as our standard approach to conservation is stronger than ever.
- I'd like to briefly share some examples of our collective progress, and what our collective next steps will be over the coming months.
- We've completed the initial round of species selections in at least one landscape in each region. All told, we've selected XX species,

representing XX landscapes and XX other species that share these habitats.

- A recently-completed independent scientific peer review of our draft technical guidance provided both significant criticisms and valuable suggestions for improving the methodology and criteria of this guidance. We're working to address identified weaknesses and incorporate suggestions before finalizing the guidance.
- In the meantime, we're using existing Strategic Habitat Conservation documents to select species in additional landscapes. This is a learning process, and I expect we will continue to work cooperatively to refine our approach based on what we learn at each stage in that process.
- We will also continue to develop population and habitat objectives, and begin landscape conservation design efforts in the landscapes where we've identified surrogate species.

- We will continue to move forward in partnership with our State wildlife agency counterparts, using the framework for Joint Selection of Surrogate Species.
- To borrow a term I know Tom Melius and Charlie Wooley often use, we will move forward “arm-in-arm”, with no daylight between us and our state partners.

### **Implementing Surrogate Species in the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers**

- In November 2013, the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers LCC Steering Committee, co-chaired by Marc Miller, concurred with the surrogate species list that was developed for the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers geography.
- We have formed a team to help guide our first steps toward implementation. Doug Helmers, Iowa private lands coordinator, and Greg Conover, large rivers coordinator, will lead this effort.

- While this implementation effort will shape how the Service allocates resources, we will include state and tribal representatives to ensure our collective efforts support conservation on the larger landscape.

### **Selecting Surrogate Species in the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes**

- Using what we learned during the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers selection process, we have set an ambitious timeline for surrogate species selection in the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes geography.
- We expect to complete our initial list by Oct. 1, 2014. Neil Powers, project leader at Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge, and Mark Brouder, project leader for the Ashland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office will lead this effort.
- Again, while this selection and eventual implementation effort will impact how the Service will manage our resources, the involvement of state and tribal representatives will ensure our collective efforts are supportive of the larger landscape.

- Our paramount goal is to ensure that our work complements that of state agencies in the region. We welcome your involvement in the in the surrogate species selection and implementation processes.
- I want to take this opportunity to thank Marc Miller (Illinois DNR Director and Steering Committee Co-Chair for the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big Rivers LCC) for stepping up to also help co-chair the Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) Council.
- This council is made up of representatives from states, NGOs and federal agencies across all 22 LCCs who will provide national-level coordination and support for the LCCs.
- Marc, your leadership has been instrumental in the progress we've made together. We look forward to strengthening these joint efforts.
- I'd now like to touch on a few other issues of interest to many of you.

### **Proposal to List the Northern Long-eared Bat as Endangered**

- Last fall, we proposed to list the northern long-eared bat as endangered, citing white-nose syndrome as the primary threat.

- We are working on a final decision that will accurately reflect the status of the bat and the extent of the threat posed by the disease.
- During the past year, we have received comments questioning the probability, and probable rate, of the spread of white-nose syndrome into currently unaffected areas.
- Questions have also been raised about how the disease will impact the northern long-eared bat in currently unaffected or recently affected areas.
- Because discussions continue among scientists about the extent and impact of white-nose syndrome to the northern long-eared bat, we have extended our deadline for a final decision to April 2, 2015.
- We are collecting additional information during a 60-day public comment period.
- In January 2014, the Service developed voluntary interim guidance for federal agencies. This voluntary guidance is meant to streamline our technical assistance for federal agencies while the northern long-

eared bat is proposed and will help them with Section 7 consultation if the species is eventually listed.

- The guidance is not intended to be a mandatory set of prescriptions that must be applied in all circumstances.
- Management measures that might be chosen from the suite of options offered in the guidance will vary from site to site.
- As we continue to work with the states and with forest industry, we expect to refine those conservation measures with forest partners and others to minimize direct harm without over-burdening partners and industry.
- We recognize that many types of timber management will benefit and help sustain habitat for the species.
- Our goal is to help develop guidance for forestry practices that minimize or avoid take of the species, as necessary, while allowing responsible, sustainable timber harvest practices to continue.

- As we work toward a final decision, I want to assure you that our field office staffs will continue to keep your staffs informed of any developments.
- Working through MAFWA, we invite active involvement by states to help us compile the best available scientific and commercial data on this species.
- I also encourage states to continue to work with us to devise practical and effective conservation strategies to conserve the bat.

### **Mississippi River and Gulf Hypoxia**

- Mississippi River and Gulf hypoxia is a national concern for all of us and through our Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, we have our best minds devoted to findings solutions.
- Midwestern states within the upper Mississippi River watershed currently contribute the greatest nutrient load to the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico hypoxic zone.

- Recent extensive, new tile drainage and conversion of Conservation Reserve Program lands to cropland in the Dakotas and Minnesota will only exacerbate nutrient loading, while dramatically reducing wildlife habitat in the wetlands and grasslands across the region.
- We need to find solutions that appeal to upstream agricultural communities and reduce the impacts downstream for fish and wildlife in the Upper and Middle Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico.
- Seven of our LCCs are preparing for a conservation design workshop that will be held in mid-August at the Ducks Unlimited headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee with this goal in mind.
- We've seen success from riparian buffers, cover crops and prairie biomass plantings in reducing runoff.
- The problem of Mississippi River and Gulf hypoxia has solutions upstream that can improve habitat for wildlife while still supporting agricultural best management practices. It just takes the right approach.

## **Asian Carp**

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service continues to be committed to the fight against Asian carp.
- We recognize that stopping Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes is imperative to the protection of local economies that depend on commercial fishing and water-based tourism in the Great Lakes to survive.
- As an active member of the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee, we provide our technical expertise to our international, federal and state partners.
- We continue to push the limits of science to improve our monitoring and assessment actions.
- Last year we made the Midwest Region home to the Service's state-of-the-art genetics lab.
- Located in Onalaska, Wis., the Whitney Genetics Lab has allowed us to expand our environmental DNA monitoring program for Asian carp.

- This year we are implementing a comprehensive, basin-wide Great Lakes eDNA Monitoring Program targeted locations that you, our state partners identified, to test for the genetic presence of bighead and silver carps.
- The goal of the program is to use eDNA as an early detection monitoring tool for the genetic presence of bighead and silver carp DNA.
- We will use this information to help inform the efforts of other monitoring efforts, such as state directed netting and traditional methods or rapid assessment tools.
- Sampling sites will include the Chicago Area Waterway System and the tributaries of the Great Lakes, Ohio River and the Upper Mississippi River.
- Our Great Lakes eDNA Monitoring Program is just one part of our response to the threat of Asian carp.
- When it comes to Asian carp, we're not backing down from the challenges that lie ahead.

- As part of that requirement, we also must provide Congress with annual updates about our progress, changes in the range of Asian carp, and a complete summary of our activities in the Upper Mississippi and Ohio River basins.
- The Act also requires the Army Corps of Engineers, in consultation with the Service and other Federal agencies, to perform a review of existing Federal authorities related to aquatic invasive species.
- Based on those findings, we will provide recommendations to Congress about how to improve laws to allow us to more effectively respond to the threats of invasive species. We hope that inspires some discussions about how to be even better at combating invasive species.

### **Collaborating with States**

- We are committed to continuing to strengthen relationships with you, our state partners, here in the Midwest Region. In coordination with our Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and their Steering

- The 2014 Asian Carp Control Strategy Framework, scheduled to be released later today by the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee, outlines numerous ongoing projects that underscore the fight against Asian carp is, and will continue to be, one of our priorities for the Midwest Region.

### **Water Resources Reform and Development Act**

- Just a couple weeks ago, the President signed into law the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014. The bill has some provisions that will help us in the fight against aquatic invasive species.
- Most importantly, the bill includes language that directs the Service to lead a multi-agency Federal response to Asian carp in the Upper Mississippi and Ohio River basins, by supporting the work being done by your states.
- That authorization will allow us to continue to be a strong partner with you as we fight to slow the spread of Asian carp.

Committees, we recently initiated a “landscape conservation communications network” to help facilitate conversation among professional communicators at the federal, state, tribal and NGO levels.

- As it matures, we hope this network will help us all to identify enhanced opportunities for collaboration on landscape-level conservation communications activities.

### **WSFR Allocations in the Midwest**

- For fiscal year 2014, the Service will distribute nearly \$1.1 billion in excise tax revenues paid by sportsmen and sportswomen from the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Accounts.
- These funds support new or ongoing projects to support fish, wildlife, conservation and recreation in the Midwest.
- The Midwest Region took home over \$210 million, or roughly one fifth of the total apportionments distributed throughout the nation this year by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program.

- The Midwest is a hub for the user-pay user-benefit Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration dollars. This year, both Minnesota and Michigan received over \$35 million, coming in at 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation for Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration apportionments, just behind our nation's largest states.
- In fact, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Missouri ranked 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th place in Wildlife Restoration apportionments received, totaling more than 91 million dollars.
- Let's talk about a few of those real world examples- the on the ground conservation efforts that state fish and wildlife agencies work so hard to accomplish.
- This year, Wisconsin received more than \$3.5 million in hunter education funding which was the 6<sup>th</sup> highest amount in the nation.
- In all, Wisconsin is dedicating more than \$3.7 million to hunter education, shooting ranges, hunter development, and focusing efforts on recruiting new participants and retaining existing users.

- These dollars have made the Wisconsin Range Development Grant Program possible.
- The program purpose is to establish range programs for increasing public access to quality, safe shooting opportunities and improving public and private ranges and to address the demand for more shooting ranges in the state of Wisconsin.
- Wisconsin's commitment to hunter education and the traditional user group is just one example of how the Wildlife and Sport Fish restoration program supports and fuels the conservation legacy of the Midwest Region and the nation.

## **OLE Thank You for Support from States on Wildlife Crime**

- I'd like to conclude by extending my deep appreciation to all of you, on behalf of our special agents and wildlife inspectors across the region.
- Together with your conservation law enforcement officers, we've been able to make great progress in the fight against wildlife trafficking, poaching and other wildlife crimes.
- Thank you for supporting their efforts and making wildlife crime a priority. And again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.
- I look forward to answering your questions, and to speaking with you personally.