

Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
USFWS Regional Director Tom Melius, Remarks

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The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cannot be achieved without the support of State natural resource agencies dedicated to fish and wildlife conservation and management. I would like to thank Roger Lande and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources for graciously hosting the Association today, especially in light of the current challenges brought about by flooding in the country's midsection. Many Midwest states are facing the same challenge as flood waters from the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and their tributaries continue to rise.

Slide 2 – Waiting on photos from DeSoto Visit

I recently saw the impacts firsthand just down the road at DeSoto and Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuges. Working with private landowners, we were able to bide time to prepare for the flood. Working together, we protected both property and lives. Safety and preparedness during these challenging times is paramount, and I would like to thank each of you for championing that within your own agencies.

When the flood waters recede, let us take a moment to evaluate potential opportunities that we can take away from this year's spring flooding.

Think back to the flooding events of 1993 and 1995 in Missouri. Big Muddy National Wildlife Refuge in Missouri – now more than 16,700 acres – was established to restore the floodplain, protect fish and wildlife resources, and lessen the impact of further flooding events. How can we work with private landowners in the future to make similar strides in floodplain protection across the region?

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In order to answer questions like these, we must work together. I want to thank many of you for hosting the America's Great Outdoors sessions this past May. Opportunities to engage with each of you on your home turf is critical to helping me learn about specific natural resource issues, challenges, and find ways that we can work together to address our shared concerns on a landscape scale. We can expand the capacity of our individual agencies and achieve our shared conservation goals by leveraging our resources, solidifying our state-federal and NGO partnerships, learning from one another, and using new, innovative technologies to effectively and efficiently communicate.

I'd like to share some key examples of how State-Federal partnerships have facilitated and strengthened our work in the field.

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One important partnership has come to fruition in the era of renewable energy development. The states of Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri and Ohio are working with the Service, the American Wind Energy Association, and more than a dozen signatory companies to evaluate, minimize, mitigate and monitor impacts of the growing wind energy industry in the Midwest. One way is through a comprehensive Habitat Conservation Plan that will outline measures to conserve threatened and endangered species, like the Indiana bat, that may be affected by wind energy facilities.

The Service has awarded states in the Service's Midwest Region an Endangered Species Act grant of more than \$3 million to develop a broadly constructed HCP designed to address the potential impacts of wind energy. The wind industry's commitment to provide the required 10 percent matching funding will help facilitate development of the plan.

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Another example is illustrated in the effort to recover and delist the gray wolf in the western Great Lakes. The states of Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin have played key roles in this ESA success story. From developing scientifically sound state management plans to maintaining

robust and efficient surveying and monitoring programs, these states have been the driving force behind wolf conservation and recovery and our current effort to remove ESA protection for gray wolves in the region.

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Similarly, the State of Ohio has led efforts that have resulted in another remarkable ESA success story: the upcoming delisting of the Lake Erie watersnake. Listed as threatened in 1999, efforts by Ohio Division of Wildlife, along with some amazingly dedicated partners, have brought about an almost unheard-of accomplishment: full recovery of a listed species – a snake! - in just over a decade. Ohio's vision, cooperative approach in working with the Service, landowners and other partners, and dedication to the resource have fulfilled the promise and intent of the Endangered Species Act and restored a unique member of the natural to community to Ohio's diverse landscape.

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The concept of teamwork is also illustrated through the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee. The Committee integrates and unifies the actions of participating agencies to create a multi-tiered

defense system to protect the Great Lakes. Early-detection and monitoring, containment, control and eradication require cooperation among multiple agencies to be successful. The ACRCC is a prime example of how strong partnerships between State, Federal, NGO and even municipal agencies can serve as a foundation for the coordinated response to complex invasive species issues.

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Protection of fish and wildlife habitat from invasive species is also key to the sustainability of outdoor recreation opportunities. Over this past year, the Service's Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) worked in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to coordinate an in-person discussion group with representatives from the hunting and angling industry in Minnesota - the primary payers of the Federal excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment, which funds the WSFR program. The objective for this meeting was to find out what manufacturers knew, and didn't know, about the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program.

The gathering of industry representatives fueled a candid conversation about the hunting and fishing sports, the excise taxes paid by manufacturers on their products, and general knowledge about the

Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program and how it works.

Working together, we gathered valuable data that will inform our communication efforts with industry representatives in the future.

By sharing the tools used by the Service and Minnesota DNR to develop this listening session, other states can have the groundwork to gather this valuable information and insight from hunting and fishing manufacturers in their local area.

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All of these examples are illustrations of why partnership is one of the most important ingredients to achieving our shared conservation goals. In this same vein, we must consider how we can efficiently and effectively work with our partners to share resources, knowledge, ideas and responsibilities.

Here in the Midwest Region, we are using Webcast technology to provide face-to-face interactions for our geographically dispersed workforce. Face-to-face interaction is key to having meaningful discussions, without the heavy cost to the environment and for our bank accounts. We have the technology and capability to expand the use of these new technologies outside of our agency to regularly communicate

with States and other partners. Let us take advantage of these available tools to work across both State and agency lines.

I would like to thank you all for your time and look forward to working as part of a team dedicated to not only fish and wildlife, but people.