

Statement of  
Eileen Sobeck  
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
Oversight Hearing: *Locally Grown: Creating Rural Jobs with America's Public Lands*  
July 15, 2010

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the important role that the lands managed by the Department of the Interior play in economic growth and the creation of private sector jobs tied to the landscape.

The Department of the Interior is the steward of our nation's natural resources and cultural heritage. Resources managed by the Department, including by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the National Park Service (NPS), the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), are economic engines for communities around the country.

In our role as steward, the Department has played, and continues to play, a vital role in renewing our economy and creating jobs that cannot be exported. We are creating jobs for thousands of young people, protecting our most treasured places and inspiring the next generation to be good stewards of our lands and waters. Our national parks, refuges and public lands are supporting recreation and tourism jobs in gateway communities across the country. And, the Department is moving to harness wind, solar and geothermal power from public lands, putting Americans to work while supplying clean, affordable energy for our future. We are leading by example, demonstrating how the wise stewardship of our landscapes is critical to our economic well-being.

Of course, the Department could not accomplish its mission without the collaboration and cooperation of a wide range of stakeholders. We take pride in the relationships we have built with gateway communities throughout the country. We have embraced partnerships and active engagement to find common ground, and to conserve and make use of our natural resources. Community-based partnerships are essential to accomplishing land management goals and can help create new economic opportunities for local businesses. Each year, the Department supports hundreds of partner organizations who participate in a wide variety of projects and efforts at the community, landscape, and national levels.

### Economic Impact

In February of this year, Secretary Salazar released to the public and shared with Members of Congress a first-of-its-kind departmental report estimating that Interior programs and activities support more than 1.4 million private sector American jobs and more than \$370 billion in economic activity across the country. The report, entitled "Economic Impact of the Department of the Interior's Programs and Activities," indicates that the Department creates and supports private sector jobs and economic growth in all 50 states. Furthermore, the report underscores the importance of investing in conservation and energy development, and the role these fields can play in getting our economy moving again.

The Economic Impact Report found that rural states especially benefit from Interior's programs and activities. In states that are more than 50 percent rural, it was estimated that visitors to Interior sites support 200,000 jobs and \$15.3 billion in economic activity. For example, many of our national parks are located in remote, rural areas. Economic effects of parks on remote, gateway communities can be significant. One study found that communities surrounding the largest units of the National Park System had, on average, almost four times faster population growth, almost three times faster job growth, and two times faster growth in real income than the nation overall. (Power, T.M. "The Economic Foundations of Public Parks." *The George Wright Forum*, 2002)

The Economic Impact Report also noted that conservation activities can generate large numbers of jobs relative to other investments of government funding. For example, every \$1 million taxpayers invest in ecosystem restoration projects was estimated to create up to 30 mostly private-sector jobs. Every \$1 million invested in recreation projects was estimated to support up to 22 mostly private-sector jobs. While federally funded ecosystem restoration and recreation activities can support substantial numbers of jobs, the actual number of jobs supported by an individual project will vary based on that project's particular circumstances.

In testifying before you today, I would like to highlight several ongoing Administration initiatives that are supporting the creation of rural jobs. I would particularly like to discuss the Administration's Great Outdoors Initiative, the Youth in the Great Outdoors Initiative, our commitment to building a clean energy economy, and the creation of the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives. I will also share with you several examples of successful collaborative conservation projects.

### The America's Great Outdoors Initiative

On April 14, 2010, President Barack Obama signed a Presidential Memorandum establishing the America's Great Outdoors Initiative to promote and support innovative community-level efforts to conserve outdoor spaces and to reconnect Americans to the outdoors. President Obama inaugurated the America's Great Outdoors Initiative at a White House Conference held at the Department in April. The conference brought together leaders from communities across the country that are working to protect their outdoor spaces and focused on developing and supporting innovative ideas for improving conservation and recreation at the local level.

The America's Great Outdoors Initiative has started a much-needed dialogue about conservation in our Nation. As part of this initiative, the Department is hosting listening sessions around the country to hear from ranchers, farmers and forest landowners, sportsmen and women, state and local government leaders, tribal leaders, public-lands experts, conservationists, recreationists, youth leaders, business representatives, heritage preservationists, and others to learn about some of the smart, creative ways communities are conserving outdoor spaces and helping Americans to go out and enjoy them.

Sessions have already been hosted in Montana, Maryland, South Carolina, Washington, California, and Nebraska. Today, as we speak, Administration officials are assembled in Asheville, North Carolina, to gather public input. Listening sessions will continue throughout

the summer, as part of the Administration's commitment to reaching out to communities for good ideas about conservation. We are going into this process with open minds, eager to learn about the efforts that ordinary Americans are making to conserve our land, water and wildlife. Our goal is to develop a conservation agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – an agenda that will incorporate and promote every positive aspect of conservation, including the creation of conservation-related jobs.

### Youth in the Great Outdoors Initiative

The Secretary's Youth in the Great Outdoors Initiative is forging connections between a new generation of Americans and the outdoors, introducing youth to the career opportunities associated with our tremendous landscapes, and very often carrying out maintenance projects in our parks, forests, refuges, and other public land units. As part of this initiative, young adults gain valuable experience, while meeting important Departmental needs. By joining conservation corps or filling temporary positions, young people help maintain and enhance trails, restore native plants while removing invasive species, and provide the public with educational information about the public lands.

At the FWS Great Lakes/Big Rivers Region, for example, youth work directly with fisheries resource professionals performing the daily duties and special projects necessary for FWS to accomplish its mission of protecting and enhancing aquatic species and their habitats, including caring for fish, building trails, maintaining grounds and facilities, and learning about daily activities at a fish hatchery.

This year, the Department will employ at least 12,000 youth—a 50 percent increase over the 8,000 employed in 2009. The Department also indirectly employs youth through other organizations, leveraging funding and human resources to impact more youth by providing them with meaningful employment opportunities. Similarly, the Department partners with numerous organizations throughout the country, including YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs, to engage youth through education and recreation programs related to our public lands..

The importance of the Youth in the Great Outdoors Initiative is reflected in the FY 2011 budget proposal, which includes large increases not only in employment of teens and young adults ages 16-25 but also in education and recreation programs that engage youth of all ages.

### Renewables

As part of securing America's energy future, we must move our nation towards a clean energy economy. At the Department, this means changing the way we do business by opening our doors to responsible renewable energy development on our public lands. We are facilitating environmentally-appropriate renewable energy projects involving solar, wind and waves, geothermal, biofuels and hydropower. These resources, developed in the right ways and the right places, will help curb our dependence on foreign oil, reduce our use of fossil fuels and promote new industries here in America. The development of these renewable energy sources will also create jobs in local communities.

The Milford Wind Corridor, in Milford, Utah is an example of one of these renewable energy projects. Secretary Salazar recently announced that construction will begin soon on Phase 2 of the Milford Wind Corridor, which the BLM approved earlier this year. When completed, Phase 2 will consist of 68 turbines with the capacity to produce 102 megawatts of electricity.

Construction is scheduled to begin this month and be completed by the end of the year. The first phase of the Milford Wind Corridor consists of 97 wind turbines that have been generating commercial power since November 2009, producing 204 megawatts of electricity sold to the Southern California Public Power Authority. That's enough energy to power 44,000 homes. To date First Wind has invested more than \$500 million in the Phase 1 project, which has created more than 250 development and construction jobs and resulted in more than \$85 million in economic benefit to Utah.

The Arizona Restoration Design Energy Project is another innovative example of the Department's work to facilitate appropriately-sited renewable energy development. The BLM's Arizona State Office has engaged local communities in this unique, forward-looking partnership to identify Arizona sites that have already been disturbed (such as abandoned mines, landfills, and brownfields) and that could support renewable energy development. Nominations have come from the BLM, other Federal agencies, tribal, state, county and local governments. Privately owned lands were nominated as well. The BLM, along with the many Federal and state agencies that have joined as cooperating agencies, has taken the information and begun work on a programmatic environmental impact statement that will analyze the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of developing such lands. This innovative project is intended to identify potential development sites for which there are fewer competing uses and values, while providing conservation benefits by taking development pressure off lands with higher resource values. The many construction, maintenance, and operation jobs that result from renewable energy development on such sites would provide additional tangible benefits to local communities as well as the regional economy.

And just last week, the Department entered into an agreement with the Department of Energy (DOE) to develop a 25-square mile Solar Demonstration Zone on federal lands in Nevada to demonstrate cutting-edge solar energy technologies. This Solar Demonstration Zone will be located in the southwest corner of the Nevada Test Site, a former nuclear site, on lands owned by the BLM and administered by DOE. Before selecting the site for the Solar Demonstration Zone, the federal government consulted with relevant stakeholders, including state, tribal, and local governments, as well as local utilities. DOE and the Department will continue collaborating to effectively implement the project, which will serve as proving grounds for new solar technologies, providing a critical link between DOE's advanced technology development and full-scale commercialization efforts.

#### Landscape Conservation Cooperatives Initiative

The Landscape Conservation Cooperatives initiative is based on ecosystem-based multi-stakeholder, multi-jurisdictional partnerships across the country. It is focused on addressing existing and emerging natural resources management challenges including climate change, and promotes geographically-based, landscape scale conservation planning. The Department has begun, with its partners, to put in place Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs). These

cooperatives will facilitate regional conservation planning along with the Department's regional Climate Science Centers (CSCs). The CSCs and the LCCs will conduct and communicate research and monitoring to improve the understanding and forecasting of which elements of Department-managed land, water, marine, fish, wildlife, and cultural heritage resources are most vulnerable to climate change impacts and other environmental stressors, and how to make them more resilient. The CSCs will provide basic climate change science associated with broad regions of the country, and LCCs will focus more on applied science at the landscape level. Both CSCs and LCCs will be involved in integrating and disseminating data and helping resource managers develop adaptation strategies.

LCCs will enable resource management agencies and organizations to collaborate in an integrated fashion within and across land ownerships. LCCs will provide scientific and technical support to inform conservation using adaptive management principles and will engage in biological planning, conservation design, inventory and monitoring program design, and other types of conservation-based scientific research planning and coordination. LCCs will play an important role in helping partners establish common goals and priorities, so they can be more efficient and effective in targeting the right science in the right places.

In creating the LCCs, the Department has undertaken an unprecedented level of outreach to partners at federal, state, tribal, local, and private levels, through workshops, web seminars, and other venues.

Progress achieved to date illustrates not only the commitment, enthusiasm and dedication with which the Department has pursued this task, but also the success the Department has achieved in attracting partners to participate in LCCs.

The USGS, FWS, NPS, BOR, BLM and BIA are fully participating in this effort and have committed funding and staff support beginning in 2011 to the CSCs in order to encourage collaborative sharing of research results and data and to provide a direct link with the on-the-ground work taking place in the LCCs. These partners and others will leverage resources available for climate change science.

### Collaborative Projects

Finally, I would like to share with you some examples of the other types of collaborative projects that are being carried out by Department bureaus. These examples include projects that were recognized this year by the Secretary for excellence in conservation partnerships. This year, 24 projects representing the work of more than 600 groups and individuals nationwide were recognized with the Department's Partners in Conservation Awards.

### The Wyoming Front Aspen Stewardship Project

The Wyoming Front Aspen Stewardship Project seeks to restore and maintain aspen stands that provide important large game habitat. This project began in September 2006 through an Assistance Agreement between the BLM's Pinedale Field Office and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and encompasses 9,000 acres of BLM lands. The project involves harvesting marketable products (sawlogs, Christmas trees, fuelwood, and biomass) during the summer

months, while leaving a fuel bed on over 80 percent of the unit. During the following spring, prescribed fire is used to reduce the fuel loads and enhance aspen regeneration. Since 2007, three timber sales have taken place to reduce conifer encroachment into aspen stands. Totaling over 500 acres and \$15,970 in receipts, these forest health projects have generated over one million board feet of timber products, 1,200 tons of biomass material, and 2,000 Christmas trees. Work within the project area has been conducted on a total of 2,146 acres, totaling \$511,182. Combined, these projects have employed 80 people. For FY 2007 and 2008 the BLM contributed \$317,000 for project implementation, with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation contributing \$40,000, Wyoming Game & Fish contributing \$105,500, and the Wyoming Wildlife Natural Resource Trust providing \$100,000.

#### New Mexico Candidate Conservation Agreements

The BLM's Pecos District and New Mexico State Office, working with their counterparts in the FWS, have engaged stakeholders in the New Mexico ranching and oil and gas industries to launch a conservation agreement program created specifically for lease holders on public lands. In this innovative program, landowners, energy companies and ranchers join the agencies in protecting and restoring habitat for two candidates for Federal listing in southeast New Mexico, the lesser prairie chicken and sand dune lizard. The agencies work with the Center of Excellence for Hazardous Materials Management to administer voluntary Candidate Conservation Agreements for oil and gas lease holders on Federal lands and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances for state and private landowners to benefit the species. In return, in the event that one or both species are listed under the Endangered Species Act, companies and individuals operating on private lands receive assurances that their operations can continue, and operators on Federal lands receive a much greater degree of certainty that their operations would likewise continue. Over a dozen ranchers and two energy companies are taking actions under the program to reduce or eliminate threats to the species on all land ownership types. These efforts have produced conservation benefits, provided operational and job security in the ranching and oil and gas industries, and created new jobs in habitat restoration. The BLM estimates that 20-30 jobs will be created in the reclamation of abandoned oil field sites (dirt moving, site remediation, etc.) and restoration of habitat for the species by a variety of vegetative treatments (e.g., aerial spraying and mechanical treatments).

#### Anchorage Youth Employment in Parks Program

The Anchorage Youth Employment in Parks Program engages youth in career opportunities and outdoor experiences to protect and restore fish and wildlife and their habitats. This robust collaboration among the FWS, the Anchorage Park Foundation, the Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska Youth for Environmental Action, and over 100 public and private organizations is reaching out to youth in populations underrepresented in natural resource management jobs to foster the next generation of public land stewards through natural resources training, habitat restoration, and protection projects and outdoor activities. Every year over three dozen youth from Anchorage area schools are employed as crewmembers to build new trails, repair fishing platforms, improve public access to fishing and recreational areas, rehabilitate stream banks, replant riparian landscapes, clean up creeks, maintain rain gardens, and implement riparian forest health protection projects to help reduce habitat loss from destructive and invasive spruce bark beetles. These projects further the mission of the Department, support the goal to connect youth to nature, and help the FWS meet its trust responsibilities for migratory birds, pacific salmon,

and other inter-jurisdictional fish. In recognition of its achievements in collaborative conservation, this program received a Partners in Conservation Award from the Department this year.

#### Circle of Flight Program

In 2009, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Circle of Flight Program, provided support to 21 tribes and two tribal organizations that collaborated with other government and private entities in Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin to protect, restore, and/or enhance 20,000 acres of wetlands; restore and/or re-seed 1,500 acres of wild rice; establish, plant, and maintain 700 acres of upland waterfowl nesting cover and prairie grasslands; construct and install 200 waterfowl nesting structures; and conduct valuable waterfowl habitat research. The Program's many projects encouraged Native American youth to get involved in a number of activities, including wild rice planting, harvesting seeds, monitoring, and data collecting. In this way, these young people experience traditional ties to the land and natural resources while gaining appreciation for their treasured natural environment. These projects not only help Native Americans exercise traditional and cultural uses of the natural environment, but also give all citizens greater opportunity to enjoy our natural resources and natural heritage. In recognition of its achievements in collaborative conservation, this program received a Partners in Conservation Award from the Department this year..

#### Modoc County, California Partnership

Through its partnership with the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service, Modoc County, CA, is developing and implementing the Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Strategy to restore the health of public land in a 6.5 million acre planning area for the benefit of the residents of Modoc County and the people of the United States. The partnership is working to improve the condition of the public land while providing for rural economic development and domestic energy production on thousands of acres within the 6.5 million-acre, multi-jurisdictional planning area. In recognition of its achievements in collaborative conservation, this partnership received a Partners in Conservation Award from the Department this year..

#### Conclusion

Our national parks, refuges and public lands continue to be economically important to rural communities throughout the West. In these areas, land use activities, such as grazing, mining and forestry, remain key sources of rural jobs and income. At the same time, uses such as outdoor recreation and conservation have gained, and continue to gain, in economic importance to rural communities.

The collaborative spirit is at the heart of the initiatives supported by the Administration. Our ability to successfully achieve our mission depends upon our ability to work collaboratively with gateway communities and other stakeholders, and partnerships are a key component in this success. Through our partnerships, the Department is working to resolve conflicts over land management, put good conservation practices in place on the ground, contribute to economic opportunities in our Nation and our communities, and create jobs for the American people.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or any other members of the Subcommittee may have.