

## **PRESIDENT SEEKS MORE THAN \$1.3 BILLION FOR U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE IN 2005 BUDGET**

President George W. Bush is requesting more than \$1.3 billion -- \$22.6 million more than last year, for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2005 budget. The request represents the administrations continuing commitment to protect America's natural resources and support conservation partnerships in communities across the country.

Among the key features of this budget package are an increase for partnership and cost-share grant programs under the President's Cooperative Conservation Initiative, and \$2 million for a new Science Excellence Initiative. Budget increases for hatcheries and migratory bird programs help to round out a package that will allow the Service to conserve, with its partners, the nature of America.

"President Bush's budget for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service illustrates his continued strong commitment to protect and conserve our nation's fish and wildlife and its habitat," said Interior Secretary Gale Norton. "In particular, the budget significantly boosts funding to support partnerships with states, tribes, local communities, private landowners and others to protect and enhance our fisheries, recover species, and increase opportunities for Americans to enjoy our public lands."

New funding in the 2005 budget to support the Cooperative Conservation Initiative includes:

- An increase of \$20.4 million for a total of \$50 million for Landowner Incentive Grants that provide state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies grant funds needed to establish or expand habitat protection and restoration programs on private land for "at risk" species.
- An increase of \$2.6 million for a total of \$10 million for Private Stewardship Grant programs that provide cost-share grants to landowners for wildlife conservation.
- An increase of \$10.9 million for a total of \$80 million for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Fund that aids wildlife conservation on State and Tribal lands.
- An increase of \$16.5 million for a total of \$54 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund that provides matching grants to private or public organizations and individuals

to carry out wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

- Increases of \$8.4 million for a total of \$90 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund that helps states increase participation in a wide array of voluntary conservation projects for candidate, proposed and listed species. The states award these funds to private landowners and groups for conservation projects.
- Increases of \$2.2 million for a total of \$12 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System's Challenge Cost Share program that provides grants that match federal and private funds for conservation projects on refuges.
- New funding of \$5 million for the High Plains Partnership under the Partners for Fish and Wildlife programs. This is a public-private collaboration initiated to pro-actively conserve declining species and their habitats and preclude the need for further species listings. The 2005 requested increase will allow the Service to pursue this effort with state fish and game agencies in the 11 high plain states, agencies within the Department of Agriculture, private conservation organizations and private landowners. Sage grouse conservation efforts will receive \$300,000 of this money. The Upper Klamath Basin Restoration, another conservation initiative, will receive an increase of \$6.2 million. The initiative will fund habitat restoration, removal of fish migration barriers, land acquisition and diminish the likelihood of water crises.
- An increase of \$2.9 million for a total of \$13.1 million for Coastal Programs grants for on-the- ground conservation of wetlands and tidal lands. Controlling invasive species will be a significant focus of this program in 2005.

"The most effective conservation projects are the ones that are conceived and carried out at the local level, by the people who live and work on the land," Norton said. "Our goal is to empower the American people to become citizen-conservationists, working together to achieve what the government alone cannot achieve."

The budget request of \$2 million for the Science Excellence Initiative is one of Director Steve William's priorities. Science excellence is the foundation for all of the Services work. Through this initiative, the Service will be taking many steps to increase our ability to acquire and apply science in the conservation of the nation's fish and wildlife resources. The budget for this initiative is divided up into two components. One million dollars will be used to shape new approaches

to the science of natural resource conservation. The remainder will be used to bolster the resources of our partners to help the Service better shape the direction of conservation efforts and to meet the changing needs of science-based conservation.

“The ever-escalating complexity of natural resource conservation demands scientific information that is rigorous, timely and relevant. This initiative supports the underpinnings of good science, promotes good decision making, and supports continuous learning and professional development, as well as stronger partnerships with other Federal or state natural resource agencies, non-profit organizations, and private industry,” Williams said.

Other notable parts of the Services 2005 budget:

- The Migratory Bird Management program would receive more than a \$4.5 million increase for permits and monitoring. This will be an important step towards identifying and meeting the needs of the program. An increase of \$1.2 million, for a total of \$11.4 million for the North American Waterfowl Management Plan will help manage waterfowl as well as the 15 Joint Ventures around the country. This successful model for achieving migratory bird conservation goals through cooperation and consultation with partners has increased the interest and number of potential partnerships.
- The Endangered Species program will receive an extra \$5.0 million, for a total of more than \$17.2 million, in its listing budget to alleviate the backlog in dealing with new listings and critical habitat designations. This program has been subject to a great deal of litigation in recent years, particularly in regards to designation of critical habitat for already listed species. This increase will address litigation-driven workloads and should also provide additional funding to address other high-priority actions that are not the subject of litigation.
- An increase of nearly \$1 million for a total of nearly \$16.9 million will help address maintenance needs at national fish hatcheries. The budget also provides an increase of \$1 million for hatchery operations, for a total of \$40.1 million.
- The National Wildlife Refuge System’s Law Enforcement budget would increase more than \$3 million.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 542

national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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