U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Resources for the Future
Budget Needs FY 2010

The Service's ability to meet its responsibilities is determined most importantly by its budgetary resources.

Our Challenges

Global climate change, shortages of clean water suitable for wildlife, and the alienation of children and adults from the natural world are critical challenges faced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These challenges come at a difficult time for the Service, as budget reductions have left us with fewer staff and fewer resources to properly train and equip staff to meet the challenges ahead.

The Service needs to build capacity to support biologically-based, landscape scale conservation. We believe this investment is an essential prerequisite to addressing climate change. Through SHC we develop science-based measures of ecological function and sustainability.

In addition, water quality and availability remains a major concern. Nothing is more fundamental to the Service's mission than the availability of water for our National Fish Hatcheries, our National Wildlife Refuges, and the landscapes and watersheds we seek to conserve for fish and wildlife. Increasing pressure on the quality and quantity of available water is challenging our traditional conservation methods, and finding successful new methods will be key to future wildlife conservation.

As Richard Louv notes in his book, Last Child in the Woods, children have become increasingly alienated from the natural world. Not only does outdoor play reduce stress, sharpen concentration, increase self esteem, promote creative problem solving and motivation to learn, it also helps forge a lifelong bond with the natural world. This bond helps ensure a commitment to the civic duty of conservation. Without the public's commitment to conservation, the Service cannot hope to achieve its mission.

Initiatives to Meet Future Challenges

Climate Change

The urgency of climate change and the severity of its effects on fish, wildlife and plants demand immediate action. The Service has begun its work to address climate change with current resources, but we cannot meet its challenges with existing funding. In FY 2010, we need to build additional core capacity in Conservation Planning and Design to spread expertise on climate change to key areas across the country. We intend to work cross-programmatically within the Service, and closely with USGS, states, and other partners.

While USGS will help with basic science on climate change, we need applied science to make management decisions in the face of climate change. Our approach must be grounded in science. But at present, the Service has no capacity to carry out this kind of science.

To plan and implement actions requires expertise from many disciplines: conservation biologists; GIS specialists; land-use planners; ecologists; computer modelers; field biologists; and climate change experts. The Service proposes to create landscape conservation cooperatives around the country to share expertise among all Service Programs and with partners from other Federal agencies, States, Tribes, universities, and private partners. Where cost-effective, the Service will co-locate cooperators with existing Service or partner facilities (e.g., the USGS National Global Warming and Wildlife Science Center), and fill in gaps by networking with experts from remote locations using web technology.

The Service also needs funds for on-the-ground projects to reduce and prevent habitat fragmentation and develop increased habitat connectivity. This needs to occur through acquiring new lands or interests in lands, opening rivers to fish passage and restoring habitat. Water management also will be key in responding to changes in precipitation patterns.

Another challenge is how rapidly changing climates and habitats increase opportunities for invasive species to spread and overwhelm native wildlife. Prevention has proven to be the most cost-effective strategy for combating invasives.

Successful conservation requires a commitment to monitoring, accountability and constant learning. To maximize efficiency, our research and monitoring efforts will be integrated with partners such as the U.S. Geological Survey, State Wildlife Agencies, and key conservation organizations.

The Service's climate change initiative is $85 million and 67 FTEs.

Water

Nothing is more fundamental to the Service's mission than the availability of water for our National Fish Hatcheries, our National Wildlife Refuges, and the landscapes and watersheds we seek to conserve for fish and wildlife. Increasing pressure on the quality and quantity of available water is shifting the emphasis of how we conserve our natural resources.

The Service must identify and prioritize water quality, quantity, and distribution needs in the National Wildlife Refuge System and the National Fish Hatchery System. Competing demands from water users, increasing pressures from development and the effects of climate change will make water resources increasingly valuable and scarce. The Service must work with local communities, private landowners, and our partners to ensure adequate quantities of water of sufficient quality are available for the aquatic and wetland-dependent trust species under our care, as well as for human consumption.

The need for water resources is so great that initial funding would be allocated to complete a comprehensive assessment of Service lands and waters, to obtain a baseline of information from which to make future decisions.

As a national leader in endangered species propagation and habitat protection, the Service must set an example for water discharge from its facilities as well as meet environmental requirements set by our State and Federal partners. The Service must continue to be deeply involved in national Section 7 water quality consultations to ensure proactive and achievable protective limits for influent and effluent are promoted. State water standards are promulgated under the national water quality criteria established under the Clean Water Act (CWA).

The Service's water initiative is $17.7 million and xx FTEs.

Connecting People with Nature

The pressing need to reconnect Americans with nature is evident in rising rates of obesity, depression, and alienation from nature among our citizens. Beyond these immediate issues, lies a looming demographic disaster as the majority of the American population becomes more disconnected from nature over time. For the first time in a century, we risk the decline of our traditional "conservation constituency." Unless we act immediately to reverse this trend we will lose even more ground as we work to conserve American biodiversity. The shrinking interest in conservation will risk failing to keep our natural ecosystems functioning to provide the benefits of clean water, cooling, and reductions in atmospheric carbon loading.

The Service is uniquely situated to carry out this mission as a result of its nearly 100 million acres of public lands and its world-class training capabilities at the NCTC, which will continue in the leadership role in the development of the Service's Connecting People with Nature Program. The requested funding would allow for further innovation to meet mission accomplishment goals across the country.