

Testimony of Marie Springer, President, Friends of Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuges
On behalf of Wallkill River and Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuges
National Wildlife Refuges
Ecological Services of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service
United States Geological Survey

House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
The Honorable Norman Dicks, Chairman
The Honorable Mike Simpson Ranking
April 28, 2009

Dear Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am grateful you are holding public witness day, once again. I am requesting \$514,000,000 for all National Wildlife Refuges for Operations and Maintenance, for FY 2010. I would also like to request emergency funding, now, for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and United States Geological Survey, to address the White Nose Bat Syndrome crisis: \$2,500,000. For my own refuge, Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge, I request \$3,280,000 for land acquisition.

In these trying economic times it seems arrogant to ask for funds for National Wildlife Refuges, something that might seem a luxury. In fact our National Wildlife Refuges are a necessity. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service are the people we have charged with protecting and preserving our most sensitive habitats and wildlife. These are the people who monitor and manage the wildlife and environment for current and future generations of Americans. Today, they face challenges that were inconceivable 20 years ago.

I would like to draw your attention to some very serious trends in occurring in our environment, the ramifications of which are beyond frightening. This is not alarmism; its the reality of globalization. We are seeing plagues of fungi and other pathogens wreaking devastating mortality in our environment. In the late 1980's, a fungus called Chytrid started killing off amphibians in Costa Rica, now it has spread all over this country, South America, and parts of Europe and Africa. In 2006 we saw colony collapse among the honey bees. Also in 2006, a killing fungus got a foot hold on the cave dwelling bat species in the caves near Albany New York. This flesh eating fungus has now been confirmed as having killed tree dwelling bats as well, meaning all bat species are vulnerable. This fungus thrives in the cool, dark, damp climate of caves and abandoned mines. Now that fungus, called White Nosed Bat Syndrome has spread like wild fire and we are seeing 95% to 100% mortality of several species of bats in 10 states. This has destroyed cave dwelling bat populations from New Hampshire, south to West Virginia. These plagues are just the tip of the iceberg, the first clear warnings of what will affect the human populace sooner or later. Scientists fear extinction of many bat species if we can not stop this within a year. I encourage you to attend USFWS and USGS briefings May 1.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the United States Geological Survey are the FEMA of the environmental world. These agencies have been under staffed for far too long and now we are seeing the ramifications. We have acted as if the environment were a luxury we could ignore. Instead we are seeing just the beginning pathogens and invasive species that can travel anywhere humans do. These are the agencies we entrust to research and manage invasive

species and endangered species. They don't have the manpower or the funding to even begin to address these catastrophes, spreading beyond control. We are in this situation because we undervalued science and how the environment affects human quality of life. We know very little about these aggressive fungi and pathogens, how long before one arrives that wreaks havoc on the human populace? We don't know the answer to that or how climate change will affect the environment and impact on human life. We all assume there are omniscient scientists lurking somewhere keeping us all safe; the somebodies that: "somebody should do something" is referring to. They aren't there, we didn't hire them, we didn't see that funding as a wise investment in the well being of present and future American people.

These plagues on the environment are our wake up call. White Nose Bat Syndrome, (WNS) is killing literally all cave dwelling bats from New Hampshire to West Virginia. Little Brown bats eat 500-1000 mosquitoes per hour. They live about 30 years and produce only one baby per year. If, we are able to stop WNS now, it would take at least 100 years for the populations to rebound to previous population levels. In the region affected by WNS, there are mosquito transmitted diseases of: West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis. Is our only option to cover every thing with even more pesticides? What will that do to pollinators? How will the ramifications of indiscriminate pesticide use affect human health? Is it a risk we can afford to take? These are the questions our scientists must address and answer. But, we do not now have the Scientific infrastructure to resolve these issues or to prepare and prevent future catastrophes. It is time to establish a National Laboratory, a central station housing these scientists from these agencies.

What we need : Hearings on White Nosed Bat Syndrome.
Emergency funding for manpower and research now.
Dedicated funds for 2010
Enactment of the North American Migratory Bat Act
Maintaining captive breeding populations
A National Laboratory

A century ago the most dominant tree was the American chestnut, now there are thought to be less than 500 known trees in existence. Billions were killed off by a fungus that was inadvertently brought over from Japan. Hemlock forests have been devastated by an insect thought to be accidentally introduced from Asia. Likewise, elm trees have also been destroyed by a fungus first discovered in Holland but originating in Asia. These are examples of the ramifications of globalization, we are not prepared to address these issues.

We are only beginning to see the ramifications of climate change, whether the cause is natural or human induced, we still have to address those issues. There will need to be migratory corridors for wildlife focusing on efforts in restoration and acquisition. We will see more species appearing on the endangered species list as development encroaches on what habitat is left. These changes will require careful monitoring; it is the USFWS and USGS whose responsibility it is to monitor, research and access conditions and threats for the well being of the American people.

In December of 2007 you voted to give the Refuge System another \$39 million slated for alleviating staffing shortages. Those funds had the effect of stopping the hemorrhaging of staff positions; the USFWS was able to stop downsizing. All Regions were able to reach their 75% manpower-25% operations budget. Alaska is 70%- 30% because of the higher costs there. It did nothing to restaff refuges that had previously been unstaffed due to funding shortages. There are approximately 30% of all refuges that are tier 1 or focus refuges in the system, the

refuges that are fully staffed. Approximately 35 % are tier 2 refuges meaning there are a few staff members. There are approximately 35% tier 3 refuges which have no staff and are not planned to have staff, if they will be staffed at all, it will be after all of the tier 2 and tier 1 refuges are staffed. The 1997 Refuge Improvement Act requires that “each refuge shall be managed”, to the criteria set forth in the Act. The USFWS is underfunded and can not meet the mandates of the Act with current funding. As things are now, only one third of all refuges can meet the mandates of the Act.

In reality we are seeing 640,000 new unemployment claims, in the U.S., as of the week of April 18, 2009. We are at a frightening 8.5% unemployment rate by household survey, nationally. In southern New Jersey the rates are as high as 12% unemployment. The USFWS currently has approximately 2,871 full time employees. With funding of \$514,000,000.00 it would allow the USFWS to add 529 employees; that's almost one per refuge. According to CARE data, the USFWS is understaffed by 2,867 personnel.

We are seeing increasingly more flooding conditions in our country. Flood plains are also known as wetlands, swamps, river basins and watersheds. These just happen to be many of the most desired lands for protection of endangered species and migratory bird habitat. I have seen far too many times where FEMA funds have been distributed to flood victims living in flood prone areas. These areas can flood again and again. In some cases the home owners can no longer get insurance and they can not sell their homes, FEMA digs them out when the floods come. As a tax payer I would prefer to see these lands paid for once, becoming part of the National Wildlife Refuges System where these waters have the ability to replenish the aquifer and reservoirs.

Wallkill is the primary Refuge in the area designated by the New York New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Connecticut Highlands. The newest refuge: Cherry Valley in Pennsylvania, is also in this area. These areas have been protected because of their habitat for wildlife and water recharge values. These areas are in the most congested areas of the East Coast and warrant funds and man power for safeguarding these lands and wildlife in these areas.

We are requesting \$3,280,000 for land acquisition for the Wallkill River Refuge for 2010. Our Fiscal Year 2010 LWCF request for the Wallkill River National wildlife Refuge will allow the Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire three critical resource and recreation properties. They include the 324-acre Armstrong Bog with important bog turtle habitat, the 52- Acre Whispering Hills property supporting state and federally listed species including the Indiana bat and wood turtle, the 68 acre Wild Stone Canyon tract. These properties include rivers streams, aquifer recharge zones, and critical wetlands to protect the integrity of the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge and provide habitat and migratory corridors for fish and wildlife. These wetlands, watersheds and forestlands help filter pollution prevent erosion and decrease the costs and damage from floods. Further, the protection of forests and wetlands that protect and retain water provide significant economic benefits to our communities by lowering water treatment costs. Protection of clean drinking water is of the utmost concern to the American public. Purchases of land and water with the Land and Water Conservation Fund- such as these proposed at the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge- will help maintain the long term integrity of water quality and quantity at the Refuge and in our surrounding New Jersey communities.

We thank you for your consideration of this LWCF funding request. We are delighted to see the LWCF program identified as a top priority for Secretary of the Interior, Kenneth Salazar,

and join other groups of the LWCF Coalition in urging support for increased overall funding of the LWCF to meet needs at the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge and refuges across the nation.

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Thank you for your time and consideration, Marie Springer