

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

House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
the Honorable Norman Dicks, Chairman
The Honorable Mike Simpson Ranking
March 26, 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 for all National Wildlife Refuges for Operations and Maintenance, for FY 2010. 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. With a growing population of more than 300,000,000 in this country we are feeling the shortage of water and increasingly finding our communities can not support the water needs of the populace. There are record drought conditions all over the South West. In my home State of New Jersey, the most congested state in the union, there is a constant problem of not being able to meet the water needs from the demands caused by over development. The more impervious surfaces there are, the less recharge there is for the aquifers.

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.

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 620,000 new unemployment claims, in the U.S., as of the week of

March 19, 2009. We are at a frightening 7.6% 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.

The USFWS also contributes to the economy of the surrounding communities by hiring contractors to perform some work on refuges. Those workers are the average blue collar maintenance workers, building contractors and sometime biological technicians who work on project by project basis. Those local people need those projects to survive in these times of meager work and employment. Sometimes it is more efficient to use contracted workers to carry out projects than to hire full time staff.. In Region 8 California and Nevada 23% of appropriated funds- \$7.4 million out of \$32 million) is spent on contracts that directly contribute to the local economy. Local economies are contributed to by fuel purchases, vehicle maintenance, food, etc. Eco tourism visits to all National Wildlife Refuges, hunting fishing, birders and other wildlife activities contributed \$1.7 billion to local economies, in 2006, and \$185.3 million in tax revenue at the local level(USFWS Banking on Nature).

Our refuges are habitat for endangered species; the USFWS is charged with protecting them and their habitat. Right now, in the North East we are seeing bat mortality at 95% to 100% due to White Nosed Bat Syndrome, thought to be a fungal disease.. We are looking at possible extinction of an entire taxonomic family. The USFWS are the people whose responsibility it is to address such an environmental emergency. We need to take a serious look at how this extreme catastrophe could have been averted had there been funding for adequate staff to prevent this from getting out of control. This will have an impact on the American quality of life, this summer and for years to come. Each Little brown bat, the size of my thumb, eats 500 to 1,000 bats per hour. The area affected by White Nosed Syndrome, is also home to Eastern Equine Encephalitis and West Nile Virus, and is also the most congested area of the country. We are paying the price for our ignorance and negligence now.

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 and changes in the stewardship of the lands. We will see major changes in diversity and in the food and water supplies. We will see more severe rain and snow storms, which will trigger flooding; now we are back to protecting the flood plains so the water has a place to go. The good news is our heating fuel needs will go down., but unfortunately our air conditioning cost will rise.

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.

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 50- 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 those 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 LWCG 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 across the nation.

Thank you for your time and consideration, Marie Springer