

**Testimony of the Izaak Walton League of America
Mike Leahy, Conservation Director**

**Before the
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

Regarding Fiscal Year 2015 Appropriations

April 10, 2014

The Izaak Walton League of America appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning appropriations for fiscal year (FY) 2015 for programs under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee. The League is a national, nonprofit organization founded in 1922 with more than 44,000 members and nearly 250 local chapters nationwide. Our members are committed to advancing common sense policies that safeguard wildlife and habitat, support community-based conservation, and address pressing environmental issues. The following pertains to programs administered by the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, the Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Keep FY 2015 Bill Free of Extraneous Policy Provisions

The Izaak Walton League strongly supports the draft rule to clarify the Clean Water Act definition of "Waters of the U.S." released by the Army Corps of Engineers and EPA. We further urge the Subcommittee not to include or accept any provision in its FY 2015 bill barring the Army Corps and EPA from proceeding with this needed and overdue Clean Water Act rulemaking. Our organization and hunting, angling and conservation groups across the country actively opposed similar provisions in previous appropriations bills funding the Corps and EPA.

The draft rule is a great step toward restoring protections for upstream waters and wetlands that were eliminated or dramatically weakened over the last decade due to confusing Supreme Court rulings and agency guidance. The Corps and EPA are proposing balanced, science-based policy to restore essential protections for streams, wetlands, and other waters. The proposal will better protect streams that provide drinking water to 117 million people and help conserve streams and wetlands that are vital to a vibrant outdoor recreation economy.

Since 2000, at least 20 million wetland acres and nearly 60 percent of stream miles in the continental United States have lost clearly defined protection from pollution and destruction. The draft clean water rule from the Corps and EPA would restore protections against polluting, draining, or filling for some of the waters and wetlands that lost such protections in the past decade. The draft rule includes exemptions for many land-use activities such as common farming and forestry practices and certain waters, including ornamental ponds.

The rule proposed by the Corps and EPA is based on sound science and clearly complies with the Supreme Court decisions in *SWANCC* and *Rapanos*. Allowing the agencies to proceed with rulemaking will partially restore protections for streams flowing to public drinking water

supplies for 117 million Americans. It will also begin to restore protections for some wetlands. Healthy wetlands are essential to waterfowl, fish, and other wildlife, provide cost-effective flood protection, and improve water quality. They also support hunting, angling, and wildlife watching, which together inject \$145 billion annually into our economy. A final rule will also provide more clarity and certainty about Clean Water Act implementation to landowners, developers, agency personnel, and state and local governments.

Departments of Agriculture and Interior, Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

The League supports the administration's request for full funding of the LWCF at \$900 million in FY 2015. It is important to begin to reinvest in strategic land acquisition to protect critical habitat, secure valuable in-holdings, and expand recreational access to existing federal public lands. Reducing funding for LWCF will not provide meaningful savings to taxpayers because it is capitalized with revenue from off-shore oil and gas drilling. Diverting resources from LWCF to offset other expenditures from the general treasury directly undermines the fundamental premise on which LWCF is based. That common sense premise is a portion of the revenue generated by natural resource extraction should be invested in conserving other natural resources at the national, regional, and state levels.

Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge System Operations and Maintenance

As a member of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement, or CARE, the Izaak Walton League supports the President's request for the National Wildlife Refuge System's operations and maintenance accounts at \$476.4 million for FY 2015. CARE estimates that the Refuge System needs at least \$900 million in annual operations and maintenance funding to properly administer its 562 refuges and 38 wetland management districts spanning over 150 million acres. At its highest funding level in FY 2010, the Refuge System received only \$503 million—little more than half the needed amount. Since that time, congressional appropriations have not only failed to account for rising costs, but have been steadily backsliding resulting in the loss of 324 employees since 2011, or 9%. Yet the Refuge System actually pays for itself several times over by generating \$4.87 in economic activity for every \$1 appropriated by Congress to run the Refuge System.

Fish and Wildlife Service, State and Tribal Wildlife Grants

We strongly oppose the Administration's proposed 15% cut to the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program which would drop funding to just \$50M for next fiscal year, down \$8.7M from the current fiscal year. This is a popular program that is critical to maintaining our country's wildlife heritage and to keeping species from declining to the point where they need to be listed under the Endangered Species Act. We urge the Subcommittee to restore funding to at least FY 2014 levels.

The Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRF)

We oppose the Administration's proposed cut of \$581 million from the enacted 2014 level for SRF. Communities depend on SRF for low-interest loans to implement costly wastewater infrastructure projects that seek to stop overflows from happening. The funding level has eroded over the years as the clean water needs of local communities have increased dramatically, but Congress has stabilized this important program for the past three years and we urge you to do so again in FY 2015. These low interest loans are critical for clean water and for ratepayers. We

urge you to support the same funding level as FY 2014. The SRF enables local governments to take actions to protect their local waters to meet Clean Water Act requirements. As the list of clean water infrastructure needs continues to expand we request that the Clean Water SRF not be cut in 2015.

Environmental Protection Agency, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

The League is very appreciative that the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) was funded at \$300 million dollars last fiscal year. We encourage the Subcommittee to support funding of the GLRI at \$300 million in FY 2015, not the \$275 million as requested by the Administration. The Great Lakes provide drinking water to 35 million people and support jobs and recreational opportunities for millions more. However, the health of the Great Lakes is seriously threatened by untreated sewage, toxic pollution, invasive species, and habitat loss. The eight states that border the Lakes and many non-governmental organizations have invested significant resources to safeguard these national treasures. Sustained federal investment at a significant level is also needed or the problems will only get worse and cost even more to fix.

Cleaning up the Great Lakes will provide many benefits, including economic development in the region. According to the Brookings Institution, Great Lakes restoration efforts produce \$2 in economic return for every \$1 invested. More recent research from Grand Valley State University suggests that the return for certain projects may be closer to 6-to-1. The University of Michigan has also demonstrated that over 1.5 million jobs are dependent on clean and healthy Great Lakes, accounting for more than \$60 billion in wages annually. Restoration projects create jobs for engineers, landscape architects, and construction workers and improve water quality, support outdoor recreation, and reestablish healthy fish and wildlife habitat. These results lay the foundation for long-term prosperity in the region.

Chesapeake Bay Program -- \$73.1 million

We support the President's 2015 budget request of \$73.1 million for the base budget of the Chesapeake Bay Program, which coordinates Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration and protection efforts. The majority of the program's funds are passed through to the states and local communities for on-the-ground restoration work through programs such as the Small Watershed Grants, Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grants, State Implementation Grants, and the Chesapeake Bay Regulatory and Accountability Program grants. Last year \$29.5 million of this went exclusively to the six Chesapeake Bay watershed states and the District of Columbia to achieve water quality restoration goals.

In particular, we urge you to increase funding for both the Chesapeake Small Watershed Grants Program and the Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction grants to \$6 million each – a modest increase over FY 2014. These are two well-run, competitive grants programs that have contributed significantly to water quality improvements throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. These are the Bay Program's only grants that go to restoration efforts by local governments and communities, not just the states. In the FY 2014 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, Congress directed EPA to increase funding for the SWG, which goes specifically to local communities for restoration work.

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) -- Chesapeake Bay Studies -- \$9.557 million

We support the President's 2015 budget request of \$9.557 million for the U.S. Geological Survey for the science that undergirds the restoration and protection efforts in the Chesapeake Bay region. This funding supports restoration of fish and wildlife and their habitats; and to assess and explain water-quality changes. There are four key focus areas for the USGS Chesapeake work in 2015: 1) restoring brook trout and their habitats in headwater areas of the Chesapeake watershed; 2) identifying the endocrine-disrupting compounds and other contaminants that threaten fisheries and wildlife in the Chesapeake watershed 3) furthering understanding of the effects of development and sea-level rise on coastal wetlands important for waterfowl; and 4) monitoring and explaining changes to water quality. The efforts of USGS are critical to preserving and restoring healthy fish and wildlife resources to the Chesapeake region.

National Park Service -- Chesapeake Regional Programs -- \$2.991 million

The National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office runs a number of small but very important programs that focus on increasing public access and the use of ecological, cultural and historic resources of the Chesapeake region. Expanding access and public awareness fosters stewardship and protection efforts. The key programs in the President's FY 2015 budget request that we support are: Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails (\$1,999,000); Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail (\$368,000); Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail (\$148,000); and, support for coordinating these programs through the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office (\$476,000).

Public Land Access Funding

The League supports the continuation of "Recreation Access" funding within the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in FY 2015. This budget item would dedicate a very small portion of LWCF to projects that improve recreational access to existing federal land that is difficult to for the public to get to. This programmatic budget proposal has had wide support in the Congress, as it has previously been included in both chambers' appropriations bills, is the focus of bipartisan stand-alone legislation, the Making Public Lands Public Access Act, and is part of a larger Sportsmen's bill. We support the \$4,000,000 for recreational access in the President's budget in FY 2015, as split between the Forest Service and the BLM.

The Izaak Walton League appreciates the opportunity to testify about these important issues.