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TESTIMONY

United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Fiscal Year 2013

Submitted by Nancy Blaney, Senior Policy Advisor, Animal Welfare Institute
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On behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute, I want to thank Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran, and the distinguished Members of the subcommittee for this opportunity to testify before you regarding funding for White-Nose Syndrome activities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service; and regarding the Wild Horse and Burro program of the Bureau of Land Management.

Since Congress last received testimony on the devastation being wrought on bat populations by White-Nose Syndrome (WNS), the picture has grown more alarming. In January, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released new estimates of the death toll: Having now spread to 19 states and 4 Canadian provinces, with over 200 sites affected, WNS has caused the deaths of between 5.7 million and 6.7 million hibernating bats. Mortality rates at many affected sites continue to be at or near 100 percent. Insect-eating bats provide pest-control services worth at least \$3.7 billion per year, and possibly as much as \$53 billion, per year to U.S. agriculture. When the death toll stood at 1 million, scientists estimated that that many bats could have eaten nearly 700 tons of insects per year. With the disappearance of bats due to White-Nose Syndrome—necessitating greater use of pesticides and raising the price of food for consumers—our country's agriculture industry is at risk of serious economic losses that will likely be noticeable in four to five years. There are public health impacts as well due to greater numbers of disease-carrying insects.

The above-mentioned agencies have been hard at work to understand the pathogen, *Geomyces destructans*, involved in the deaths of so many bats, to identify steps to control and prevent its spread, and assist states with WNS oversight, surveillance, research, education, and outreach. Projects include: detailed studies of *Geomyces destructans*, its transmission, and possible means of mitigation; improving WNS detection techniques; developing a better understanding of bats' resistance and susceptibility to infection and of the persistence of the fungus in the environment.

We very much appreciate Congress' concern over this wildlife, environmental, and economic disaster, and the steps it took in the FY 2012 appropriations redirecting \$4 million in Fish and Wildlife Service spending to WNS, and instructing the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service to prioritize research related to WNS and the inventorying and monitoring of bat resources on agency lands. There is a need, however, for new funds, as identified below, to support the many research, surveillance, prevention, and mitigation efforts needed to address this increasingly urgent problem.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: \$4,500,000 (Recovery Fund)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leads the federal government's WNS efforts and supports all of the Working Groups under the White-Nose Syndrome National Plan. We ask the committee to maintain the President's FY 2013 Recovery Fund request of \$81.909 million, including **the requested \$1.897 million within that amount for WNS, to be supplemented with an additional \$2.603 million, also for WNS.**

This \$4.5 million will fund: (1) **Interagency coordination**, providing and relaying scientific information and guidance to and among Federal and State agencies, tribes, landowners, recreation, and conservation groups to ensure best practices on WNS-related issues, such as research findings, status of disease spread, and fungus decontamination procedures; (2) Identifying priorities for **applied research** that will assist in combating WNS and managing its spread, and funding projects that support these goals; (3) **Support to state wildlife agencies** to conduct disease surveillance, monitor bat populations, implement conservation measures, and conduct research; and (4) **Conservation action for bat species in decline due to WNS**, including assessing populations and spectrum of threats and providing guidance on needs of species to Federal and State agencies and private land owners.

U.S. Geological Survey: \$1,000,000 (Account: Ecosystems Mission Area, Wildlife Program)

We ask the committee to maintain the \$1 million request in the President's FY 2013 budget in order to allow enhancements to USGS's WNS surveillance and diagnostic capabilities, and to support research on topics such as the following: (1) **Pathogenesis** – the origin, development, and resultant effects – of WNS; (2) **Vaccine development**; (3) **Prevalence and survival** of WNS fungus in cave environments; and (4) **Modeling** WNS disease processes.

These activities support the goals of the following working groups of the National Plan: (1) Diagnostics; (2) Disease Management; (3) Epidemiological and Ecological Research; (4) Disease Surveillance; and (5) Conservation and Recovery

National Park Service: \$300,000

We ask the committee to provide \$300,000 for the National Park Service's WNS efforts, which include the following: (1) **Preventing WNS spread** by conducting visitor decontamination and monitoring flow of visitors on an as-needed basis; (2) **Conducting on-the-ground surveillance** of disease; and (3) **Monitoring** for disease presence or absence on NPS lands.

These activities support the goals of the National Plan Disease Management Working Group.

Bureau of Land Management: \$1,000,000 (Account: Management of Land and Resources (MLR), Fish and Wildlife Activity)

In order for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to comply with Congress's FY 2012 directive to "prioritize research related to White Nose Syndrome in bats and the inventory and monitoring of bat resources on Bureau-administered lands," we ask the committee to provide

\$1,000,000 for BLM's WNS efforts. This will fund conducting bat inventories of the BLM's presently known caves and abandoned mines, which will support the goals of the National Plan Disease Management Working Group.

U.S. Forest Service: \$1,500,000 (Accounts: Research and Development, Forest & Rangeland Research (FRRE), National Forest System, Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management)

In order for the Forest Service (USFS) to comply with Congress's FY 2012 directive to "prioritize research related to White Nose Syndrome as well as inventory and monitoring of bat resources on Forest Service lands," we ask the committee to provide \$1,500,000, to be divided between the Research and Development branch and the National Forest System branch. With this level of funding, the USFS will be able to undertake the following: (1) **Research** on topics such as enhancing environmental conditions for bat survival in the face of WNS, possible biological controls for WNS, and ways to measure the status and fitness of bat populations; (2) **Preventing WNS spread** by conducting visitor decontamination and monitoring flow of visitors on an as-needed basis; (3) Conducting on-the-ground **surveillance** of disease; (4) **Monitoring** for disease presence or absence; and (5) **Managing** forests to optimize bat habitat.

These activities support the goals of the Disease Management, Epidemiological and Ecological Research, and Conservation and Recovery Working Groups of the National Plan.

Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (WFRHBA)

The wild horse is as much a symbol of American heritage as the image of Uncle Sam and baseball. Currently, these wild horses are at risk of mistreatment by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which misuses most of its budget to round up and warehouse wild horses and burros to make room for privately owned cattle. Wild horses have been removed from over 19 million of the 52 million acres allocated to them by Congress. Since 2004, wild horses have been at risk of being sold to killer-buyers who make a profit by sending horses to slaughter for human consumption. **AWI requests that any increase in appropriations under the WFRHBA be solely used for implementation of humane, on-the-range management methods such as immunocontraception versus unnecessary roundup. AWI strongly encourages that this "no-kill" language also be maintained to ensure the BLM does not kill healthy wild horses and burros:**

"Provided, that appropriations herein made shall not be available for the sale or destruction of healthy, unadopted, wild horses and burros in the care of the Bureau or its contractors."