

S. HRG. 109-788

**LEGISLATIVE FIELD HEARING ON S. 260,
“THE PARTNERS FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE ACT”**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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APRIL 22, 2005—TULSA, OK
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ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

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C O N T E N T S

	Page
APRIL 22, 2005—TULSA, OK	
OPENING STATEMENTS	
Inhofe, Hon. James M., U.S. Senator from the State of Oklahoma, prepared statement	1
WITNESSES	
Hall, Dale, Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Region 2)	5
Prepared statement	20
Bidwell, Terry, partners program participant, Wildlife Biologist, and Professor, Oklahoma State University	10
Prepared statement	22
Chervanka, Verlene, partners program participant, Sayre, OK	14
Prepared statement	24
McKnight, Hal, partners program participant, Duncan, OK	11
Prepared statement	23
Neal, Jeff, partners program participant, Indianola, OK	9
Prepared statement	22
Straughn, Debbie, principle, Deer Creek Elementary School, Emond, OK	13
Prepared statement	24
ADDITIONAL MATERIAL	
Statement, McDaniels, Andy, Oklahoma Wildlife Federation	25

**LEGISLATIVE FIELD HEARING ON S. 260,
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ACT”**

FRIDAY, APRIL 22, 2005

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS,
Tulsa, OK.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 1 p.m. in the Tulsa Conference Center, Oklahoma State University, Tulsa, OK, Hon. James M. Inhofe (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senator Inhofe.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES M. INHOFE,
U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA**

Senator INHOFE. Our hearing will come to order and let me explain to you a little bit about what is going on here. When you have a piece of legislation that is major in any way, you always have hearings, and normally those hearings take place in Washington, DC. Now, we decided that—I’m the chairman of a committee called the Environment and Public Works Committee, so I can have it anywhere I want, so we’re going to have it in Oklahoma and we’ll talk about this program in a minute, but let me just before we do that thank you for coming.

This is a very significant thing, this is something that people like. I mean, you know, when I became chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee back in—well, it’s 2 years ago now, it’s the largest committee in Washington. Its environment side is all the 17 bureaucracies including the EPA, Corps of Engineers and all that, and then the public works side is all the public works, bridges, buildings and roads and highways and all of that, so it is very significant and one of the first things that I said when we started off is what we’re going to do is three things, No. 1, in terms of the 17 bureaucracies, we’re going to have sound science based on decisions that are sound science, not this garage science that a lot of people use; No. 2, we’re going to have cost-benefit analysis so people know how much all this fun is costing them; and, No. 3, an attitudinal change. There are some—some bureaucracies and I would say the IRS is a good example, the EPA has historically been a good example of people in getting them instead of ruling to have an attitude of serving and that’s what this is all about today.

Before I start, I want to make an announcement that will be—should be exciting to everyone here, even though it has nothing to

do with our subject today, I've been trying to get our highway reauthorization bill through since a year ago this week. Last year we got it passed out of the committee, my committee to the senate, from the senate floor to conference and conference, it died there at that time, that's back when Tom Daschle was there and he was obstructing things. Well, he's not there anymore, so we're going to get this bill out and just this morning I had very good news, we went ahead and filed—it's kind of complicated, it's a technical thing, procedural matter, parliamentary matter, it is a motion to preclude someone from filibustering the highway bill so that when I go there on Monday, if you turn on C-SPAN starting at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, you're going to see me talking for 6 hours about the highways and we're going to try to get it out before the end of the week, that's a deadline, so we're looking forward to trying to get that done. There's nothing Oklahoma needs more right now. We are tied with Missouri being dead last in the condition of our bridges and I don't think there's anyone here who traveled in whether you came in from Sayre or southwest Oklahoma or southeast Oklahoma who didn't realize as they were traveling along the roads that we have a great need.

Now, I want to welcome our witnesses representing each corner of the State and thank them for their testimony. I would also like to thank Mr. Jontie Aldrich, the director of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program here in Tulsa, for his help in coordinating today's hearing. Today's field hearing concerns legislation that I've introduced. It's S. 260, the Partner for Fish and Wildlife Act, that I've sponsored along with Senator Jeffords. You might know Senator Jeffords is the ranking Democrat on the committee that I chair. He just announced his retirement yesterday as a matter of fact, which I was—I won't tell you. Anyway, also, Senator Cochran who is chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, you can't ask for a better co-sponsor of legislation than the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Today is the 35th anniversary of Earth Day which has become in many parts of the country a day for extremist environmentalist organizations to tell us all what's wrong with the world. However, the truth is much different. This—I'm going to tell you something that people are not aware of, over the last 35 years our Nation has made great progress in providing for a better environment, improving public health. Between 1970 and 2003, listen to this, the gross domestic product has increased 176 percent, the vehicle miles traveled increased 155 percent, energy consumption increased 45 percent and the United States population grew by 39 percent, and during this same period of time, the emissions, the air emissions from the six air pollutants dropped by 51 percent. Now, that's since the Clean Air Act and then the Clean Air amendments of 1990. It's a huge success. But with the media who doesn't want you to believe that anything good is going on in the environment and for the far-left environmentalist groups who hate hearing nothing about the environment, they're money making machines to try to elect liberals to Congress, you don't hear these good news, but being Earth Day, I wanted to share that with you.

On August 26, 2004, President Bush signed Executive Order 13352 to insure that Federal agencies pursue new cooperative con-

ervation actions designed to involve private landowners rather than simply make mandates which private landowners must fulfill. What a refreshing change this is, to see people as I've been talking to you as you arrived today, people who are enjoying this, people who want to expand their programs and we'll hear from them today. As the Chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, a new approach to conservation is especially important to me. All conservation programs should create positive incentives to protect species and above all should hold the rights of private landowners as sacred. A positive step towards those aims is authorization of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program which has already proven to be an effective habitat and conservation program that leverages federal funds and utilizes voluntarily private landowner participation. Since 1987, the Partners Program has been a successful voluntary partnership program that helps private landowners restore habitat. Through over 35,000 agreements nationwide with private landowners, the Partners Program has accomplished a restoration of over 700,000 acres in wetlands, one and a half million acres of prairie and native grasslands and nearly 6,000 miles of riparian around in-stream habitat. Partners Program agreements are funded through contributions from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and in-kind contributions from participating private landowners, which is actually three-to-one private landowners. Since 1990, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has provided—I was talking about Oklahoma now—\$3.5 million of private landowners which have contributed, private landowners, \$12.5 million so \$3.5 million and \$12.5 million to restore 124,000 acres of habitat in Oklahoma through 700 individual voluntary agreements with private landowners. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service District Office in Tulsa currently reports that at least another 100 private landowners are waiting to enter into Partners projects as soon as funds become available. Currently, the Partners Program operates only as a line item annual appropriations bill and is subject to funding redistribution to other programs. Let me tell you what that's all about. You have a good program, it's worked for years, everybody wants it. The only ones against it are the far-left environmentalists who think if it's not something completely controlled by Washington, it can't be good; and, consequently, it's something that is appropriated each year. Now, through this process you might get an appropriation that looks like it would do a good job for the country in one year, then all of a sudden because there are other needs, they start taking out of the appropriations and redistributing that money in other programs. This legislation provides specific authorization with funding similar to what I have just described the authorization program for highways and specific authorization with funding to allow the program to operate and grow in the future. To date, the Partners Program has received little attention. My bill will build on the successful program to provide additional funding and added stability. Prior to hearing testimony from our first panel, I'd like to show a short part of an ESPN program that was sponsored by the National Rifle Association supporting the Partners Program and highlighting participation landowners in Oklahoma. The landowners featured in this video, Jeff Neal and Verlene Chervanka, I'll get that a little more naturally

in a minute, they're here, so we have a couple of movie stars that are here today. I want you to look for them up here, Verlene, and see what you look like on the film, so we'll watch that first and then I'll introduce our panel. By the way, we do have quite a bit of the staff that's here from Washington from my committee that's come down to make this official and the person who is not the technician is Ryan Jackson. He's trying to operate the TV right now. I'll give you 30 more minutes. By the way, Ryan Jackson is one of the main people who is making a successful operation out of cleaning up Tar Creek, you know, something they said couldn't be done and we're doing it now and Ryan is probably the one that has more to do with that than anybody else.

[Whereupon, the video was shown.]

Senator INHOFE. That was good. That's good. Let's give our stars a hand. OK. Good. All right. Well, Dale, thank you for being here. I'll submit for the record Andy McDaniels' statement be made a part of the record at this time without objection. Dale, thank you for being here and we'll just recognize you at this time for an opening statement. Before you do, let me mention, see, we have Nathan and Sage, and Ryan you've already met, who are here from the committee from Washington. We have quite a few and where's Collison? Collison, he had a hard time sitting still waiting that long before they shot that turkey. Lou Halsey, Josh Kivett, Danny Finnerty. Who else do you have here? I guess that's it. All right, Dale, you're on.

[The prepared statement of Senator Inhofe follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES M. INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE
STATE OF OKLAHOMA

Good afternoon. I want to welcome our witnesses representing each corner of the State and thank them for their testimony. I would also like to thank Mr. Jontie Aldrich, Director of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program here in Tulsa, for his help in coordinating today's hearing.

Today's field hearing concerns my legislation S. 260, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act that I have sponsored along with Senator Jeffords, the Ranking Member on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and Senator Cochran, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Today is the 35th Anniversary of Earth Day which has become in many parts of the country a day for extremist environmental organizations to tell us what is all wrong with the world. However, the truth is much different. For instance, over the last 30 years, our Nation has made great progress in providing for a better environment and improving public health. Between 1970 and 2003, gross domestic product increased 176 percent, vehicle miles traveled increased 155 percent, energy consumption increased 45 percent, and U.S. population grew by 39 percent. During the same time period, total emissions of the six principal air pollutants dropped by 51 percent. So this hearing is especially appropriate to be held today because it concerns a program demonstrating actual environmental results in full voluntary cooperation with private landowners.

On August 26, 2004, President Bush signed Executive Order 13352 to ensure that federal agencies pursue new cooperative conservation actions designed to involve private landowners rather than simply making mandates which private landowners must fulfill.

As Chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, a new approach to conservation is especially important to me. All conservation programs should create positive incentives to protect species and, above all, should hold the rights of private landowners sacred.

A positive step toward those aims is authorization of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program which has already proven to be an effective habitat conservation program that leverages federal funds and utilizes voluntary private landowner participation. Since 1987, the Partners Program has been a successful voluntary partnership program that helps private landowners restore habitat. Through over 35,000

agreements nation-wide with private landowners, the Partners Program has accomplished the restoration of over 700,000 acres of wetlands, 1.5 million acres of prairie and native grasslands, and nearly 6,000 miles of riparian and in-stream habitat. Partners Program agreements are funded through contributions from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and cash and in-kind contributions from participating private landowners.

Since 1990, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has provided \$3,511,121 and private landowners have contributed \$12,638,272 to restore 124,285 acres of habitat in Oklahoma through 700 individual voluntary agreements with private landowners. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service District Office in Tulsa currently reports that at least another 100 private landowners are waiting to enter into Partner's projects as soon as funds become available.

Currently, the Partners Program operates only as a line item in annual appropriation bills and is subject to funding redistribution to other programs. My legislation provides specific authorization with funding to allow the program to operate and grow in the future. To date, the Partners Program has received little attention. My bill will build on this successful program to provide additional funding and added stability.

Prior to hearing testimony from our first panel, I would like to show a short part of an ESPN program sponsored by the National Rifle Association supporting the Partners Program and highlighting participating landowners in Oklahoma. The landowners featured in the video, Mr. Jeff Neal and Mr. Verlene Chervanka, are here to testify this afternoon.

I will also submit for the record a statement from Mr. Andy McDaniels with the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation, and I would like to thank Mr. McDaniels for his help in bringing attention to today's hearing.

I will now call up our first panel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Director Dale Hall.

STATEMENT OF DALE HALL, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, REGION 2

Mr. HALL. Thanks, Senator. It's truly an honor for me to be here today to testify on S. 260 and the great program that has been displayed here already this afternoon. I'd like to request that my written comments be submitted for the record.

Senator INHOFE. Yes. You can take longer than the normal time. Why don't we start off by saying what states are in this region.

Mr. HALL. Yes, sir. I am the Regional Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and our regional office is in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Our region is Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma. As the Regional Director for the Fish and Wildlife Service, one of the privileges I have is to be part of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The service firmly supports the philosophy that by working together, the federal government and private landowners can achieve tremendous success in habitat conservation. In August 2004, President Bush signed an Executive order on cooperative conservation asking all agencies to strengthen their efforts to work together with tribes, States, local governments and landowners to achieve conservation goals. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program exemplifies the Service's dedication to cooperative conservation and our commitment to work with private landowners to further the country's conservation goals while honoring individual landowner rights. That's very important. Many Partners Program projects achieve conservation goals alongside ongoing productive economic activities and that is a substantial goal that we receive. The vast majority of this habitat in the United States for fish and wildlife resources is in private hands. Estimates have been as high as 70 percent of all fish and wildlife habitat in the United States is owned by private landowners. If we are to leave a real legacy of conservation for future generations, we have to find ways

to honor those landowner stewards that have been out there on the land, want to improve the land and want to leave it better than they found it. To help achieve these goals, in 1987 the Service established the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, otherwise known as the Partners Program, under the broad authority of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and the Fish and Wildlife Act. The Partners Program is a voluntary habitat restoration program that recognizes the long-standing and strong natural resource stewardship ethic present in many private landowners. As an example, in Oklahoma, the Partners Program has experienced tremendous success. Since 1990, we have initiated 684 projects on over 128,000 acres of private land. This includes 14,400 wetland acres, 82,600 grassland acres, 1,300 woodland and shrubland acres, 25,100 acres of other habitat and over 230 miles of riparian stream. Furthermore, the Partners Program funds have created over 100 outdoor education classrooms on school campuses that will provide future generations of Americans with hands-on experience working with the land and wildlife, and I understand you'll be hearing from both landowners and from the school system today and I just want to compliment the people ahead of time for the great work they're doing. S. 260, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act, would codify the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Because of the tremendous success of the program and working with private landowners to conduct cost effective habitat projects for the benefit of fish and wildlife resources in the United States, I am pleased to announce and testify on behalf of the Administration that the Administration supports this legislation. Senator, if you have questions.

Senator INHOFE. That was just as of today.

Mr. HALL. That is as of today. We got it cleared yesterday.

Senator INHOFE. It's very unusual, Dale, I'm glad you mentioned that, because the Administration has a policy that they don't—they don't endorse any legislation until it is actually in a—passed out of a committee, so this is an exception and it should tell you how strong they feel about it. Now, it's been handled the way that I described just as a line item, but this is authorization. Why don't you share with us the advantages to having this as an authorized program.

Mr. HALL. Well, you mentioned some of those advantages in your opening comments, but it's really important to differentiate between a program that's established through budget appropriations and a program that's established through legislative mandate. As you pointed out under the earlier, this program has been funded for since 1987 through the normal appropriations process, but that is always open to be cut, to be eliminated even because there's no, what we would call, organic legislation that institutionalizes this program. Your bill does that for us and gives us the standing in this program to be able to push back even in budget cut times to make sure this program survives and keeps going.

Senator INHOFE. Don't you think also there is—that the fact that you can plan for the future, you can look down the road and say, This is what we'll be able to do in the future, but you can't do that when it's a year-to-year uncertainty. The S. 260, which is otherwise known as the Marriage Opportunity Relief and Empowerment Act of 2005, provides a variety of tax releases—relief includes Section

308 which provides for specific tax exclusions or deductions for payments made under the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. I would like to get you on record as to whether you believe that this legislation should include that deductibility of the federal share as it does in the legislation.

Mr. HALL. The security for the private landowners that this is not a punishment is absolutely essential. When a private landowner steps up and expends their funds, not only are they offering up their lands, which is a gift to the American public for the natural resources, but they're also spending their own money and we believe that it would be a sin to have them have to pay taxes on the moneys that come to them to help do these benefits that really reach out to the entire American public. Waterfowl, natural resource, air, water, all of these benefits come from habitat restoration. I am not enough of a scholar to understand whether or not it needs to be in two places because I don't know the different committees that might have to be discussed with and the different sorts of debates that might have to go there. I would simply say that it's critically important that the private landowners that receive funding to help us with habitat through this, that it is extremely important that they not have to pay taxes on those moneys that they receive from us.

Senator INHOFE. I certainly agree with that. You have this in several states within your jurisdiction. Do you have any anything specific you can say about what you have done in terms of—to help either threatened or endangered species?

Mr. HALL. Oh, yes, sir. If I may give a little background, I have worked in the endangered species program as well for well over 15 years and I have seen leading with regulation and how it fails. The American public wants to have good natural resources. They want to have species. They want to have diversity on the property. I have never met a landowner that wouldn't like to have endangered species on their property. They're proud to be the land stewards. But we cannot expect them to work with us and help us recover those species if the banner that we're working under is no good deed goes unpunished, so we have to find ways to substitute regulation with partnership and voluntary actions in cases—and actually a good example is the lesser prairie chicken. We have petitioned to list the lesser prairie chicken and we have, frankly, resisted that because we've had the Partners Program working with private landowners restoring habitat for the lesser prairie chicken and if you look at what the Endangered Species Act really asks us to do is to identify threats to a species and then try to figure out ways to address those threats so that it's not endangered extinction or won't become. The Partners Program allows us to get out in front of that, start working to create the habitat and habitat is the primary factor that causes a lot of species to be listed. We get out and start restoring the habitat that you've seen in the film and through as you pointed over 2 million acres nationally and, you know, several hundred thousand acres in our region alone over the past years, it gives us a chance to recover a species without having to have regulation. When you do that, partners are willing to come because the threat of no good deed goes unpunished is not there, so this is really important and I believe that what we're seeing now

in the debates over the Endangered Species Act is that the Partners Program will eventually become the delivery mechanism for recovering species. The Act passes its goal to delist, to recover the conservation of the species, regulation does no more than hold status quo. There is no law in the United States that allows us or any other federal agency to require anyone's habitat be improved. Regulation can only hold current status. The Partners Program really moves it forward, increases the values and brings back real recovery objectives.

Senator INHOFE. That's good, Dale. You know, I know it's a little irregular to do this, but you've come further than anyone else. Well, that's not true, we have some from Washington to be here today, and I would like to ask if there are any—confine it to landowner, do any of the landowners here have any questions that they'd like to ask, take advantage of the fact that he is here in Oklahoma and you have access to him, any questions you want to ask him?

Mr. CHERVANKA. Well, I'd like to say the Partners Wildlife Program, I've worked with government agencies, you know, like putting land in CRP and different programs with USDA, but there's always a question mark in the back of your mind when you work with them, they've got too much control over you really, this might be my thinking, but with the Partners Program, when I started working with the Partners Program, it's all different. They're just like another landowner. We're all trying to get together and do the same thing. That feeling is just not there, just kind of broke down the barriers. I get to work with all of them and that's how I feel about your program.

Mr. HALL. We can't say enough about how we appreciate you being willing to make these contributions. I know the landowners see it that they're doing something they enjoy and they're getting some good hunting values and, you know, I love to hunt, too, but what's often left out is that Verlene is making contributions to all the people in the United States when he does that. I don't think that's recognized as often as it should be.

Senator INHOFE. Verlene, you're trying to be very, very generous in the way you said that. I can remember when about 3 years ago we had a Regulatory Agency was trying to declare propane as a dangerous, hazardous material and I noticed—I was chairing the committee hearing in Washington. I noticed a bunch of kids in orange and red coats and I didn't know who they were that year coming in and I didn't know who they were when they sat down and during the course of this thing we had the bureaucracy over here saying, "Well, we need to be regulating this and it doesn't hurt to have one more level of bureaucracy crawling over the farms. We've calculated it's only going to cost your Oklahoma farmers some \$700 a year and they can afford that." Well, we beat the thing and these kids in the back stood up and applauded and it ended up being the Oklahoma Ag Leadership Group and I didn't even know they were there, but this is what he's getting at because a lot of times there is this attitude you find prevalent in Washington where, again, they're here to rule, not to serve. You, Dale, are here to serve. We appreciate the contributions you've made. Now, we're going to ask

the other panel to come up. Do you have time to stay for the other panel or do you have to get back?

Mr. HALL. It would be my privilege to stay here as long as you need me, sir.

Senator INHOFE. Fine. Thank you very much for being here today. Our next group, if you would take the stand, we have Mr. Jeff Neal who is a professional hunting guide conducting many international hunts. Mr. Neal owns 1,600 acres in southeastern Oklahoma near Indianola. Part of the property is in the Partners Program. He will testify on the improvements made on his land through the program and his intent to continue with the program. Mr. Neal is featured in the NRA-sponsored video on Partners Program which we just saw. The next witness will be Dr. Terry Bidwell. Dr. Bidwell is a wildlife biologist and professor at Oklahoma State University. Do you hear that, John?

Mr. COLLISON. Yes, sir.

Senator INHOFE. He has personal property and OSU property in the Partners Program. Mr. Hal McKnight, Mr. McKnight is from Oklahoma City and he has 200 acres in the Partners Program near Duncan, OK and helped create the Partners Program outdoor classrooms in the Oklahoma City area. Ms. Straughn is a principal of Deer Creek Elementary School in Edmond. As I pointed out to her, Edmond is the largest city in Oklahoma without an airport. She needs to address that. She has an outdoor classroom for students sponsored by the Partners Program. Verlene Chervanka, who we've already heard from and we'll hear from again, owns 1,250 acres in northwestern Oklahoma near Sayre on his property, 315 acres are in the Partners Program. So this has been successful and what we'll do is we'll go ahead and use the 5-minute clock on this for opening statements. Your entire statement will be made a part of the record and we'll start with Mr. Jeff Neal.

**STATEMENT OF JEFF NEAL, PARTNERS PROGRAM
PARTICIPANT, INDIANOLA, OK**

Mr. NEAL. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the opportunity to discuss my involvement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. I first became involved in the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in 2001. My wife, Jennifer, and I purchased the 1,200-acre ranch along a 5-mile stretch of the South Canadian River. The Neal Ranch is located in Pittsburg County along the South Canadian River. Our property is located just to the west of Lake Eufaula, Oklahoma's largest reservoir. After we purchased the land, we needed a lot of technical assistance to maximize our land for wildlife. I contacted the Partners for Fish and Wildlife officials in Tulsa, OK, particularly Jontie Aldrich. They have worked with me by providing the technical assistance, advised me of other State and Federal conservation programs and provided cost-share funding for wetland restoration and native grass restoration. Without the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, it would not be as productive for my family's needs and the wildlife resources that now live on my ranch. Our restored and enhanced wetlands have increased the biodiversity, the waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds and other wetland-dependent wildlife species. We see river otters

frequently and have a pair of nesting bald eagles and a good population of the endangered Least Terns nesting on the Canadian River. When we purchased the property, it had 250 cows grazing; therefore, it was eroded and damaged by the cattle and their unsupervised grazing. We got the cows off and immediately began working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program. During the first 2 years we owned the property we rarely saw any evidence of much wildlife. Since the Partners Program has assisted with the development of the dikes and planning of the 120-acre native grass area, we now see a lot of deer, turkey, quail and most plentiful waterfowl and shorebirds. For instance, I arrived at the ranch last Friday, April 15, 2005, at 5 p.m. and by 5:30 I had seen over 300 teal; geese; 20 to 30 American white pelicans; a herd of deer; and 2 flocks of turkey. Before the help of the Partners Program, the areas that now hold these species were beat down and overgrazed fields. Conservation, preservation and maintaining habitat for wildlife isn't something new to me. I've enjoyed a career of 30 years in the international hunting industry and have had the opportunity to witness all kind of lands worldwide that maintain the population of wildlife. My belief is if we don't create habitat and maintain it, there will no future in America for our wildlife. As human population soars, animals can lose. As I've witnessed in most of the African and European countries that still have wild and unfenced wildlife, the only reason they have this is because they have provided good habitat, food source and most of all good supervision. When I mention supervision, I'm referring to private land that is controlled by someone such as in the United States. It would be more than likely the landowner. We must create habitat for wildlife and protect it and with the partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Partners Program and the landowners, it is a win-win situation.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you very much, Mr. Neal.

Dr. Bidwell.

STATEMENT OF TERRY BIDWELL, PARTNERS PROGRAM PARTICIPANT, WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST, PROFESSOR, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Dr. BIDWELL. Thank you, Senator. It's a pleasure for me to be here today. I'm speaking both as a private landowner and also a representative of Oklahoma State University, so I kind of have two hats to wear today. Jeff was smart to double space his and I didn't, so I'm not going to try to read mine. My bifocals don't focus that well anyway, but I think I can summarize quite well. My wife and I have been involved with the land for many years in Oklahoma. Three of our four sets of grandparents were all homesteaders here in Oklahoma, so we've been around land our whole life. We've been through many different kinds of programs and the Partners Program is a real success. We've been involved in our private land in northern Payne County for about 10 years with the Partners Program. We've developed three or four wetlands depending on what you define as a wetland on our riparian zones. We had there one that needs to be repaired. We've used three free stock tanks and fencing through the Partners Program to restrict the livestock access to the water, which, in turn, has really benefitted the livestock

themselves. It reduces the chances for disease and parasites, so that's a benefit. Also, if any of you have cattle, you realize in the wintertime sometimes you need to chop ice and having those freeze-proof tanks there makes me—I can be a little lazier and I can quail hunt instead of chopping ice for the cattle, so there's a benefit. We also use our place as kind of an avenue for single-parent families, for people to come out who have children that want to fish or hunt that aren't able to go out and do that thing. We sponsor duck hunts for kids, for example we take kids fishing, we have a Boy Scout troop that comes out on and uses the area quite a lot, so a lot of people get benefit from the Partners Program on our land beyond just our family.

The next issue is my job. In the past 31 years I've worked for several agencies. Now I work for Oklahoma State University and I've seen plenty over the years of various programs that have come and went with cost-share programs, government programs and privacy of the private landowners. It's been stated here many times today the key is cooperation and that's what I see with the Partners Program that is really great and it also interfaces very well with other government cost-share programs, it doesn't overlap them, but it's very complimentary. So in my job with OSU, if people don't invite you to their land, I don't have a job; in other words, it's all by cooperation. OSU obviously doesn't have a cost-share program to work with private landowners, so I know a lot of the employees of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Some of them are former students and the real key to this program that's not been stated today, it's very successful because of the way it's set up, but the biggest success are the people that the Fish and Wildlife Service has hired that go out and meet with those landowners on a one-on-one basis because that's where the war is either won or lost is the one-on-one contact and that's the real benefit of the Partners Program are the employees of the Fish and Wildlife Service that do that. That's not just in Oklahoma. I work in other States and by and large it's been a tremendous program because of the people that go out to the field and work with private landowners like myself and Jeff and others here.

Mr. NEAL. Yeah.

Dr. BIDWELL. So I really appreciate the opportunity to be here.

Senator INHOFE. Well, good. Thank you very much for that. Mr. McKnight.

**STATEMENT OF HAL MCKNIGHT, PARTNERS PROGRAM
PARTICIPANT, DUNCAN, OK**

Mr. MCKNIGHT. Thank you. Certainly, thank you, Senator Inhofe, for allowing this occurrence and for your staff, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For my entire life, I've held one dream paramount above all others, that dream has been to improve and restore habitat. This dream has come true because of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. We started working with Jontie Aldrich and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the early 1990s on land that has been in our family for five generations. Many neighbors thought I had totally lost my mind when we started cutting up prime grazing land in southern Oklahoma. Over 200 acres of wetland projects have proven their profound effects. Creation of

these projects have greatly benefited our cattle operation by distributing grazing and by distributing water. Additionally, strategically placed wetlands have proven that they totally prevent soil erosion which we've had a great problem with in southern Oklahoma. Kevin Costner in the movie, *Field of Dreams* stated, "Build it and they will come." Unfortunately, not one deceased baseball player has ever appeared at our wetlands; however, we have had a tremendous biodiversity of wildlife and waterfowl that have collected around these wetland sites. We've lost over half the wetlands in the United States since 1950. Loss of habitat has resulted in a doubling of species listed on the endangered and threatened list in the last 10 years. The Partners Program is truly a bright burning star in this darkness. It's a wonderful government program, a true volunteer partnership program that works very well except for one thing. The one thing this program lacks is annual funding. If this can be obtained, everyone involved will feel like we've won the lottery. Our wetland projects have received both local and national attention. In 1994 Conservation I was greatly honored to receive the National Wetland Award to the private sector. Local awards included recognition from the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation. Several documentary films and large publications have featured our wetlands in the area of Stephens County which is east of Duncan, OK. *Readers Digest* in 1999 did an article called, "Champions of the Wild" on our sites. A photographer was dispatched from Los Angeles, CA, to take my picture for the article. She asked me to stand in the marsh holding a saddle over one shoulder, a rope and a shovel over the other. If I would have done that, I would have drowned. Instead, I brought along my Labrador retriever, Hawk, and I said, "We'll look stoic together." The photograph, fortunately, turned out extremely well. We received hundreds of calls and letters as a result of that article. About half of the correspondence was asking about the Partners Program and how people could benefit with the wetland restoration project on their land. The other responses inquired about stud service with my dog, Hawk. With over 30 million photos published in *Readers Digest*, Hawk became the most photographed dog in the world. Public awareness for the Partners Program is essential. Part of that responsibility is owned by cooperates like myself. There are zillions of people like myself that wish to be good stewards of lands and waters. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program allows that to happen. It has been a true privilege to be a cooperator in the Partners Program. I greatly appreciate the time and effort put forth by Jontie Aldrich and everyone at the Tulsa office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We could not realize our dreams coming true without their help. I hold deep gratitude for champions of this program. Senator Jim Inhofe is one such champion in part because the Senator understands the program and the need for annual funding. The late Jim Valvano, who was coach at North Carolina State, once told me it was impossible to motivate anyone else. He tried his entire life to do that with players. Finally, one day he realized he could at best only motivate himself. Every morning when he would wake up, he would ask himself one question, Am I going to be passionate about this day? Jim Valvano believed passion was the key to success. The continued success of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife

Program depends on the passion of everyone involved. I encourage all to sustain this passion. The profound effects of the Partners Program are limitless, thank God. Thank you.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. McKnight. All right. Ms. Straughn, tell me why the students at Deer Creek Elementary School would care about this program.

STATEMENT OF DEBBIE STRAUGHN, PRINCIPAL, DEER CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, EDMOND, OK

Ms. STRAUGHN. Well, Senator, thank you very much for allowing me to talk today. We care deeply about the Partners because we tried to construct an outdoor classroom initially with private contractors and it was a disaster. In fact, we had private contractors take advantage of us, so it was not until the Partners came along that we were able to change things drastically.

I am a principal at Deer Creek Elementary. It is a Blue Ribbon School which is located in Edmond, OK. As a Blue Ribbon school, we are always looking for ways to involve our children in hands-on learning opportunities. It was very important to us to be able to add environmental studies for our children. We were able to do this by creating an outdoor classroom. I first became involved with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in 2002, really out of desperation after what I had just described a little bit earlier with the previous contractors that we had worked with. We started making phone calls throughout the State of Oklahoma and that's when we found Terry Dupris and Jontie Aldrich at the Oklahoma Partners for Fish and Wildlife Service. They were able to provide us assistance and training with our outdoor classroom. It was a dream our school had. We really wanted to provide a hands-on learning opportunity for our children. We were in desperate need, as I said earlier, and the partners really came through for us by coming up with a new design for our outdoor classroom. The vision and the dream of a new outdoor classroom came into reality because of their guidance. We feel it's very important for our children to be involved in the outdoor classroom because it will successfully educate young children on our natural resources. The outdoor classroom provides the ideal structured learning environment. The teachers and students have taken ownership in our outdoor classroom. Every child at Deer Creek Elementary School is involved in the outdoor habitat. For example, our kindergarten has a bird sanctuary; our first grade has a flower garden; our second grade has a butterfly garden in the shape of a butterfly; third grade, a vegetable garden; fourth grade, has a flower garden in the shape of Oklahoma and there are flowers planted there that depicts our Oklahoma history and our heritage; fifth grade has a bird blind and also has a frog pond. Besides that, we have gazebos constructed with help from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We also have wetlands, walkways with animal tracks, and artificial nesting structures for wildlife. This outdoor habitat gives children an interactive learning environment. I want to thank you, Senator Inhofe, for supporting the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. I am here on behalf of all of our children at Deer Creek Elementary. I think the technical and financial assistance of the Partners Program has helped turn our outdoor classroom into a wonderful

project. This is one government program that truly benefits all. Children are our future and environmental studies for children is disappearing. Approximately 2 percent of our children now have an opportunity to work in an outdoor classroom or learn about the environment compared to the early 1900's where almost all children had an opportunity to work the land or understand wildlife. Please help us to continue the Partners for Wildlife programs so that children can continue to explore and understand their environment. Thank you.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you very much. Mr. Chervanka.

STATEMENT OF VERLENE CHERVANKA, PARTNERS PROGRAM PARTICIPANT, SAYRE, OK

Mr. CHERVANKA. I want to thank you, Senator Inhofe, for the invitation to testify at today's hearing. I'm Verlene Chervanka and I own 1250 acres of property in southwest Oklahoma near Sayre. As the video shows, I've been involved with Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program with other conservation programs for the last 6 years. I manage my entire ranch for conservation of wildlife. Much of my property operates as a cattle ranch. Another 250 acres is used for raising wheat. Another part of my property contains natural gas wells with more being planned. I have 315 acres dedicated strictly for the conservation of wildlife. Through cost sharing with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture programs, I have invested time and money in these acres that have reached great rewards. For example, with the help and coordination of the Partners Program, I have restored 40 acres of wetlands on my property. Since that time, this 40 acres has become a refuge for many waterfowl species, shorebirds and wetland birds. I've also had an osprey that visits my wetland every spring, I guess on its migration back north. This 40 acres didn't need to be designated as a refuge by the Federal or State Governments. I made this decision to create the refuge on my own property. That is important to me and that is the kind of assistance that the Partners Program provides. These conservation practices have also turned my property into that sanctuary for wild turkeys and deer as you see on the video.

Before my involvement in the Partners Program, it was rare to find such game on my property. In fact, due to the success of the Partners Program on my property, other ranchers in southwest Oklahoma have been interested in starting their own projects. I also want to testify—I also want to especially thank the local Partners Program here in the Fish Wildlife Service offices in Tulsa. I think it's very important to point out that the success of this program in Oklahoma is due in large part to the director of this program, Jontie Aldrich. Jontie and his staff have done a great job in establishing a great reputation for the Partners Program in Oklahoma. The Partners team has worked hard to build a reputation of trust between the private landowner and the Partners Program. Landowners know that this program is about the Federal Government coming in—is not about the Federal Government coming in and telling you what you could do or can't do on your own land. The Partners Program has developed a strong reputation to help the private landowners to create habitat. The program is appro-

priately named the Partners Program because it is a real partnership of government and private landowners working together. All states should have a great working relationship with landowners in Oklahoma, as landowners in Oklahoma have with the Partners Program. I can't compliment Jontie Aldrich enough to administrate this program. Without him it would never have been possible. Also I want to say that—Jontie will probably verify this, like I mentioned earlier when the Senator asked me that question about the government programs, you know, you always get a little scared of government programs, in fact you might be afraid of them, so when Jontie came out and we got this program administered and everything was ready to go, I said, "Jontie, tell me for sure what kind of red tape is involved, am I going to be in any danger in any way in this program?" He said, "definitely not." He made me feel real secure. He said, "You're the man, you're the caretaker of this program, and that's—that's what I like." He convinced me and I convinced—tried to convince everybody else. We have field days out at least once or twice a year with other landowners that come out and see what's taking place and I really appreciate it. Senator, I know you're a great protector of this program and I want to thank you. Thank you for your time.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you very much. We are—it's a joy to do this, really. There are some things in my job that aren't much fun, but this is. Let me just ask a couple of questions here, things that will come up I'd like to have you folks put in the record. I'll start with you, Mr. Neal. We know this is completely voluntary. Have you found that the program in any way limits your property rights?

Mr. NEAL. No.

Senator INHOFE. How about any of the rest of you, any—I'd like to get—

Mr. CHERVANKA. Absolutely not.

Mr. MCKNIGHT. No.

Senator INHOFE. Dr. Bidwell, I know you have personal property.

Dr. BIDWELL. (Shakes head.)

Mr. MCKNIGHT. Not at all.

Senator INHOFE. When you said that there's some things when Jontie came along and they were putting this program together, were there some things that you would not have understood if it hadn't been for their technical advice and help?

Mr. CHERVANKA. I wouldn't have understood them. I had Jontie to explain them to me. One thing, you know, you kind of hesitate because this was a big project, it took a long time to complete it, you know, am I going to be allowed even on my own place after we put these wetlands in, and he said, "You're going to be the guy running the property and you're going to be the caretaker." I'll tell you, I am a caretaker and they come out quite often to inspect it, which I'm really glad they do, and I have other people come out, Jontie, if anybody ever wants to come out to the place and inspect that, that's what we've got to have.

Senator INHOFE. Yeah. Well, you know, you hear the negative things. I was in a town hall meeting not too long ago in Kingfisher—

Mr. CHERVANKA. I might say—mention one other thing, Senator, and first I really got upset, you know, with CRP land. I just

didn't—I didn't fully understand and I've been in CRP for 20 years. Well, they drilled a gas well on this CRP land and I thought everything was taken care of and they knew that everything was taken care of and the oil company said it was all taken care of. Well, they drilled this well. Everything went good and all of a sudden I get a real bad letter from the government, you know, that I owed all this money back, that it wasn't reported and I got fined, I don't know. How much was it?

Unidentified speaker. 1200.

Mr. CHERVANKA. How much?

Unidentified speaker. 1200.

Mr. CHERVANKA. A \$1250 fine. It just made me feel bad. Said if you declare bankruptcy, we're going to do all of this, do all this, so I take it over to the USDA office. They said it's just a formality letter, but, see, this is the kind of deal that you get into and we got it straightened out, I paid \$1250, called the Chesapeake Oil Company and they claimed they're going to refund that money to me.

Senator INHOFE. You know, I would tell a story, but it wouldn't have—be very germane to this hearing, but when I said that we are attempting to get—to have an attitudinal change in bureaucracy, that's exactly what I'm talking about. I can remember the EPA making people believe they're going to be assessing fines on something on which they had no control. That's the type of thing we're going to change and I think you people are being very cooperative in this program.

Dr. Bidwell, I guess we should have started off by thanking you. You're the one here representing Oklahoma State University. We're using your facilities and we appreciate that very much. You look at it from a landowner and also in your relationship with Oklahoma State University. What types of benefits can you see in terms of economic development would come from this program?

Dr. BIDWELL. One of the big issues in Oklahoma with the Oklahoma legislature and the Governor has been the interest in revitalizing rural communities throughout the State of Oklahoma. One of the big areas that has tremendous potential is recreational leasing, whether it be hunting and fishing. We work with ranchers now in western Oklahoma and western Texas who are doing bird watching trips and a number of other things other than traditional land use that have greatly supplemented their income. There are small rural communities now getting together networks to form cooperatives, if you will, or ideas that actually market this type of activity in western Oklahoma in particular, but even in eastern Oklahoma, so that's a—Partners Program has assisted landowners in developing areas that are beneficial to not only their livestock and farming operations, but also the secondary type of income and recreational leasing and that's a story that maybe the Oklahoma legislature hasn't heard of before as they probably need to because we see good examples of that all over the State.

Senator INHOFE. I appreciate that. Ms. Straughn, you've talked about your outdoor programs and your outdoor classrooms. Walk us through one.

Ms. STRAUGHN. Well, it is a place where not only children go, but the teachers and also the parents. We have trails that lead you down into the actual facility and along the trails you see various

varieties of trees. The children have made little hand plaques that tell the variety of the trees, and then you go to the various areas that every grade level has developed. Every child has their hands in the soil. They're planting, digging, and picking fruit and vegetables. You can walk through the trails that take you through the wetlands area, then we have a large area of trees. They're locust trees that children can walk through a pathway. There's a bird blind in the trees where children can actually observe birds. We also have a frog pond. You can look at the tadpoles and watch as they become frogs. Our outdoor classroom also has an amphitheater where children can do science experiments. They also put on plays. There's a pavilion that our parents have built and they go there for outdoor science lessons. We also have a bird sanctuary where students can observe birds.

Senator INHOFE. Is this all on school property?

Ms. STRAUGHN. It's all on school property. We actually had a blank piece of land. We bought a new facility 3 years ago. The only thing that was on the land were some locust trees in the back. We got together as a school and we developed a vision for a new outdoor classroom. We did a lot of research and studying. We found that children just are not exposed to the environment anymore. Houses are built so close together. Families are moving away from the rural areas and we wanted our children to have an opportunity to be part of the outdoor environment. This is a dream come true.

Senator INHOFE. I found this really interesting. One of the things that I have done since I've chaired this committee, we discovered that there are discretionary grants that are being sent out all the time from the EPA that are filling our young kids' minds full of garbage science and things that just aren't true and a lot of it comes from these far-left environmentalist groups. You saw just last week that the environmental liberation front actually fire-bombed a building, they've killed people. These things are going on right now and I contrast that with how you describe this program. I think—John, I want you to schedule me to go by and see this. You know, obviously the school, that's a State issue; however, I've been looking for a Federal handle as an excuse to go in there to get to see so I could go back with some alternatives to what they're doing. By the way, we have stopped those discretionary grants taking place, so I'll be by to see you.

Ms. STRAUGHN. One thing, too, Senator Inhofe, is that as you know, the No Child Left Behind Act, that everyone is familiar with has, created an academic performance index score. Every school in Oklahoma has to take certain kinds of State tests that gives you an exit score. Our school, Deer Creek Elementary School, if I could brag just a little bit, had the highest API score out of every high school, middle school and elementary in the whole State of Oklahoma last year. We were No. 2 this year and I believe it's because of programs like our outdoor classroom where children are learning at the highest level. Our children are smiling while they're enjoying their environment, they are also working together. That's what all this is about. We have to learn to be team players and be able to work alongside with each other.

Senator INHOFE. That's great. Something that would be good for other schools to do, too. Mr. McKnight, have you found that this

Partners Program offers a meaningful incentive; in other words, you'd be doing things you otherwise wouldn't do?

Mr. MCKNIGHT. Well, I was—it was trying to open a can with a sledgehammer, a lot of the efforts that we were putting forth just were not effective, and through the Partners Program, which has been consistent, we started getting involved with this in the early 1990's and this program has been right on. It has been consistent. The information that we've been able to gain from this and you start working with Mother Nature and she will give you a score card. It may not be the one you want, but we've learned a lot from our successes as well as from our failures on this. But this program and being administrated through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been consistent as the sunrise and I think that's one of the things that we've talked about in this a lot and there's a degree of paranoia when you go into a partnership with anything with the United States starting the title of.

Senator INHOFE. Uh-huh.

Mr. MCKNIGHT. We have learned through our efforts that there's really nothing to fear and it's definitely been a true partnership. It's definitely been a win-win situation and we're continuing to do this and a lot of the neighbors that were concerned about what we were doing originally have become partners themselves, so it's been a very successful experience. To relate to some of what Debbie is saying, we still have inner children in all of us and to go out and work the land and the water and to see a difference, it's hard to explain that to someone that hasn't shared that experience, and in Oklahoma 90 percent of the land is privately owned, so for this to move forward, for us to restore habitats and wetlands, it does take a partnership situation and there are moneys that come—about approximately between 30 and 40 percent that comes from the Government to fund this project, but we do not lose any of the integrity of the private ownership that we have of our land, plus there's a little of sweat equity involved. I've never seen Jontie sweat, I don't know what the man does, but he is—he is out there.

Senator INHOFE. Jontie, come down and sweat for us.

Mr. MCKNIGHT. He and the staff of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been extremely involved in helping us troubleshoot situations and to go ahead and sometimes it seems like, well, there's a risk worth taking and they have guided us in ways we've all succeeded.

Senator INHOFE. Let me do something a little bit irregular, we'll limit this, but Mrs. Paula Templeton with the Wagoner Conservation District has also set up four outdoor classrooms; is that correct?

Ms. TEMPLETON. We have three.

Senator INHOFE. You have three others and do you want to make a short statement?

Ms. TEMPLETON. I wanted to make a short statement about the staff. Ken Williams, Jontie, Terry Dupris, they get on their knees and their hands and help you mud-in grass. They do whatever they have to do to help you. We were met by doing outdoor classrooms for different schools in Wagoner County and I work for the Conservation District there. We would head up like 10 learning stations and we would rotate the students through, 200 at a time, and

Mr. Aldrich came and talked to me and said, "You know, you ought to have an outdoor classroom and keep these kids on school property so you don't have to bus them, they're right here." I said, "I don't even know what to do." He said, "I'll help you, because I'm just a secretary, a plain Jane woman," but buddy he can teach you how to do the job, and we built gazebos, we built the trails, but you know the best part was, it wasn't just "T" and I, it was communities and it was brought on by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It brought people that were just local citizens out to do the job. It made a partnership with them and also working as partners with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, I've worked with him on Partners for Wildlife programs with our farmers. Never have I had a bad comment. Schools are happy with them and she will testify, too, that they don't come back to the school and harass them and say, You have to do this, you have to do that, they work with them on a one-on-one basis and when we're through, we're through. I recommend you fund them all the time. They're good people.

Senator INHOFE. OK.

Ms. TEMPLETON. I just wanted to mention that to you. They're good. Give it to them.

Senator INHOFE. All right. Well, let me—both Dr. Bidwell and Ms. Straughn have talked about how this program has helped kids. The other three of you have any experiences you could share with us as to the benefits of young people from this program?

Mr. MCKNIGHT. We've built—in central Oklahoma, we've built several Partners Program called Eagle Ridge Institute and we have a lot of inner-city kids from Oklahoma City to that site to fish. Oklahoma Department of Wildlife has been very helpful in that. A lot of kids that have never seen a fish, never seen a fishing rod, the first thing you learn is you bend the bars back on the hooks, but from that an entire area is being basically directed to inner-city youth adjacent and because of the catalyst of the Partners Program that we've been able to put in there and there's—yeah, we're just scratching the surface I think. Kids know a tremendous amount about wildlife and about nature. You know, they just—they're hungry to learn more and love to be a part of it. We've used them and involved them in putting up wood duck boxes and goose nests. They love to be part of that. That's where the future lies, so this program certainly has a wonderful outreach to kids of all ages.

Senator INHOFE. That's great. That's great. Any other comments on that subject?

Ms. STRAUGHN. I'd like to say one thing on that, too. We've been having visitors from all over the country visit our outdoor classroom. We even have schools from overseas, too Jontie and Terry Dupris' have been a tremendous help to our school. It's spreading to other States. There's even an outdoor classroom in Germany. The presence of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has made a tremendous impact. In fact, if you have a chance to look at our PowerPoint presentation later, you can see that children are actually interacting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Senator INHOFE. OK. I have everything I need, but if there's any one of the five of you who just really want to say something else, this is your chance to do it.

Mr. NEAL. I'd like to say it's trust. You know, we have to trust these guys and you can trust them. I'd like to go back to the moment I met Jontie Aldrich. I bought this piece of property and I contacted Terry Bidwell. Terry was my first person when I was excited, I had this dream property, Terry came out, we sat in the car for 6 hours or something, and he gave me the best advice of anybody, he said, "Talk to all the agencies, talk to everybody, learn the property and pick out who you think has got their act together." I had many different people out, local and from—in the area and from the state and "T" came out and he said, "Trust your fellow man." He said, "This is the greatest piece of property in the State of Oklahoma," you can do so many great things with it, but I'm in the hunting business and when you see a guy with a badge come up, you expect, Can I see your hunting license, and that's not—that's not the situation here. This is a marriage, a relationship, a partnership that does work and these people will become the landowners' best friends. I just can't say enough about putting funding towards it.

Dr. BIDWELL. You didn't invite me back.

Mr. NEAL. You stayed too long the first time.

Senator INHOFE. I guess 6 hours was long enough. Well, anyway, thank you all five for coming today. We do have what we need. We have—it's a program that we will pass through, it will be expanded, it will be permanent and it will be predictable, something you can put together. I want to thank you and all of your people who have come from the Wildlife Service as well as the landowners and my staff and appreciate very much being a part of this. It's a good program and we're going to make it work better. We're adjourned.

(Whereupon, the hearing was concluded.)

[Additional statements submitted for the record follow:]

STATEMENT OF DALE HALL, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and S. 260, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act. I am Dale Hall, Regional Director, Southwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Service is the lead Federal agency responsible for conserving and protecting the Nation's fish and wildlife resources. Throughout the United States, the Service strives to fulfill this responsibility to the American public through the establishment of innovative programs that implement the Secretary of the Interior's four C's initiative Conservation through communication, consultation, and cooperation.

The Service firmly supports the philosophy that by working together, the Federal government and private landowners can achieve tremendous success in habitat conservation. In August 2004, President Bush signed an Executive Order on Cooperative Conservation asking all agencies to strengthen their efforts to work together and with Tribes, States, local governments, and landowners to achieve conservation goals. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program exemplifies the Service's dedication to cooperative conservation and our commitment to work with private landowners to further the country's conservation goals while honoring individual rights. Many Partners Program projects achieve conservation goals alongside ongoing, productive economic activities. Through these efforts, the Service helps the Nation achieve and maintain healthy lands and waters, thriving communities, and dynamic economies.

The Service has long recognized that successful protection of many fish and wildlife species depends significantly on the protection and management of habitat. The vast majority of this habitat is in private ownership. It is, therefore, imperative that the Service look for opportunities to partner with private landowners to protect spe-

cies and enhance their habitat on private lands. Such cooperative conservation provides opportunities to enhance habitat while maintaining private property rights; it also engages the public in private stewardship. Because restored habitats provide important food, cover, and water, this strategy can contribute to the Service's mission to conserve trust species such as migratory birds and inter-jurisdictional native fish, threatened and endangered species, and to control and reduce the spread of invasive species.

To help achieve these goals, in 1987 the Service established the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners Program) under the broad authority of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956. The Partners Program is a voluntary habitat restoration program that recognizes the long-standing and strong natural resources stewardship ethic present in many private landowners. The Partners Program helps these landowners restore wetlands and other important habitat on their lands. Through the program, the Service is able to fund on-the-ground projects that enhance, restore, or protect wildlife habitat.

The program also leverages funds, working to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs for projects. On average, the Service succeeds in leveraging Service resources against non-Service resources by a 2-to-1 match ratio. Over the past 16 years, almost 35,000 agreements with landowners have been completed. The resulting partnerships between the Service and private landowners have resulted in the protection, restoration, and enhancement of nearly 2.5 million acres of private and tribal habitat nationwide.

In Oklahoma, the Partners Program has experienced tremendous success. Since 1990, the Service has initiated 684 projects on over 128,000 acres of private land. This includes 14,400 wetland acres, 82,600 grassland acres, 1,300 woodland and shrubland acres, 25,100 acres of other habitat, and 236 riparian stream miles. Furthermore, Partners Program funds have created over 100 outdoor education classrooms on school campuses that will provide future generations of Americans with hands-on experience working with the land and wildlife.

The cooperative conservation fostered by these projects has benefited not only fish and wildlife species, but also local communities in Oklahoma. For example, at the Deep Fork Ranch owned by Robert Baker, 400 acres of wetlands have been enhanced, restored and protected using Partners Program funds. These restored wetlands provide optimum migrating, wintering, and breeding habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds and other wetland dependent wildlife species, as well as essential habitat for many neotropical birds. Since these restoration activities were completed at Deep Fork Ranch, the area's biodiversity has dramatically increased, and Mr. Baker and neighboring landowners have benefited as well. The Deep Fork River community has a long history of damaging floods caused, in part, by past land use practices in the watershed. However, Mr. Baker's project has increased the water-holding capacity of the land and will help reduce water volume and velocity on neighboring properties when flooding events occur in the future.

The Administration evaluated the Partners Program for the FY 2004 budget through the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART). The PART analysis found that the program was optimally designed to encourage habitat restoration and conservation on private lands and is achieving annual performance goals directed at benefiting fish and wildlife resources. The PART acknowledged the lack of specific authorization for the program, identified general authority for the program, and consensus among the interested partners on the program's purpose.

S. 260, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act, would codify the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Because of the tremendous success of the program in working with private landowners to conduct cost-effective habitat projects for the benefit of fish and wildlife resources in the United States, the Administration supports this legislation. However, to ensure that the program retain its present character and flexibility to work with private landowners and to be consistent with the President's Budget, the Service would like the opportunity to work with the Committee to make technical changes to the bill.

In summary, the Service is lead Federal agency responsible for conserving and protecting the Nation's fish and wildlife resources. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is a voluntary, incentive-based habitat restoration program focusing on private and tribal lands that utilizes an innovative approach to further cooperative conservation throughout the country. The Service is encouraged that Congress is also committed to cooperative conservation and support the Partners Program. As a Federal agency, we will continue to strive to fulfill our responsibility to the American people to protect and conserve our nation's public resources. We continue to recognize that our success is tied to our ability to work with others in the name of conservation including private landowners.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement on the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and S. 260. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the other Members of the Committee might have.

STATEMENT OF JEFF NEAL, PARTNERS PARTICIPANT FROM INDIANOLA, OK

Good afternoon Senator, thank you for the opportunity to discuss my involvement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

I first became involved with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in 2001. My wife, Jennifer, and I purchased a 1,200 acre ranch along a five mile stretch of the South Canadian River. The Neal Ranch is located in Pittsburgh County along the South Canadian River. Our property is located just to the west of Lake Eufaula, Oklahoma's largest reservoir.

After we purchased the land we needed a lot of technical assistance to maximize our land for wildlife. I contacted the Partners for Fish and Wildlife officials in Tulsa.

They have worked with me by providing the technical assistance, advised me of other state and federal conservation programs and provided cost-share funding for wetland restoration and native grass restoration. Without Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, it would not be as productive for my family needs and the wildlife resource that now lives on my ranch.

Our restored and enhanced wetlands have increased the biodiversity for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds and other wetland dependent wildlife species. We see river otters frequently and have a pair of nesting Bald Eagles and a good population of endangered Least Terns nesting on the Canadian River.

When we purchased the property it had 250 cows grazing, therefore, it was eroded and damaged by the cattle and their unsupervised grazing. We got the cows off and immediately began working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program. During the first 2 years we owned the property, we rarely saw evidence of much wildlife.

Since the Partners Program has assisted with the development of the dikes and the planting of a 120 acre native grass area, we now see a lot of deer, turkey, quail, but most plentifully waterfowl and shorebirds.

For instance, I arrived at the ranch last Friday, April 15, 2005 at 5:00 p.m. and by 5:30 I had seen over 300 teal, Geese, 20 to 30 American white Pelicans, a herd of deer and two flocks of turkey.

Before the help of the Partners program the areas that now hold these species were beat down and over grazed fields.

Conservation, preservation and maintaining habitat for wildlife isn't something new to me. I have enjoyed a career of 30 years in the international hunting industry and have had the opportunity to witness all kinds of lands worldwide that maintain populations of wildlife.

My belief is if we don't create habitat and maintain it there will be no future in America for our wildlife. As human population soars, animals lose.

As I have witnessed in most of the African and European countries that still has wild and unfenced wildlife, the only reason they have this is because they have provided good habitat, food source and, most of all, good supervision. When I mention supervision I am referring to private land that is controlled by someone such as in the U.S. it would more than likely be the land owner.

We must create habitat for wildlife and protect it, and with a partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Partners Program and the landowner it's a Win - Win situation.

Thank you.

STATEMENT OF TERRY BIDWELL, PARTNERS PARTICIPANT, WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST, AND PROFESSOR, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Three of our four sets of grandparents were homesteaders in Oklahoma. Thus we have been involved in agriculture and land management for many years. Our family has been a cooperator with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program for about 10 years. This Program has helped us develop 3 wetlands on riparian zones in 213 acres of tallgrass prairie. Cattle are excluded by fencing from these wetlands to maintain water quality (reduced turbidity), provide nesting cover for resident waterfowl, and provide a fall/winter/spring food source for migrating waterfowl and other wildlife. The water control structures on these wetlands allow us to change the water level to facilitate the growth of plants that benefit both fish and wildlife. Freeze-proof stock tanks installed below these wetlands provide a

dependable source of high quality water for cattle (no water born diseases or liver flukes) and eliminates the need for chopping ice during cold weather.

Over the years, this project has been greatly enjoyed by our family and others. We have hosted public school groups for conservation education and our Boy Scout troop camps around these projects monthly. We have also hosted Quail Unlimited Field days and cattlemen's tours on the value of the Partner's Program to landowners. The Partners Program is not only valuable to fish and wildlife habitat management but also contributes to rural economic development and diversification for ranching and farming enterprises by increasing landowner's ability to lease for recreation.

For the past 31 years I have worked with private land owners as a consultant in rangeland and forestland management with an emphasis in restoration of native plant communities for integration of wildlife and livestock enterprises. For the past 25 years I have worked for Oklahoma State University in research and extension targeting the needs of private landowners. Habitat for wildlife and livestock can be mutually beneficial as demonstrated on many farms and ranches in Oklahoma and elsewhere throughout the country. The Partners Program is an integral part of natural resource initiatives that benefit private lands and environmental quality. The Partners Program is complementary to other private, State, and Federal programs that help landowners plan, implement, and maintain conservation practices on their land.

STATEMENT OF HAL MCKNIGHT, PARTNERS PARTICIPANT FROM DUNCAN, OK

My name is Hal McKnight. For my entire life I have held one dream above all others. That dream has been to improve and restore habitat. This dream has come true because of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

We started working with Johntie Aldrich from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the 1990's on land that has been in our family for 5 generations. Many neighbors thought I had lost my mind when we created wetlands across prime grazing land in Southern Oklahoma. Over 200 acres of wetland projects have proven their profound effects. Creation of these projects has greatly benefited our cattle operation by spreading out both available water and grazing. Additionally, strategically placed wetlands prevent soil erosion.

Kevin Costner in the movie "A Field of Dreams" stated, "Build it and they will come." Unfortunately, not one dead baseball player has appeared at our sites, but countless species of waterfowl and wildlife have.

We have lost half the wetlands in the United States since 1950. Loss of habitat has resulted in a doubling of species placed on the Endangered and Threatened Lists.

The Partners Program is a bright burning star in this darkness. It's a wonderful government program. A true volunteer partnership program that works very well, except for one thing.

The one thing this program lacks is annual funding. If this can be obtained everyone involved will feel like they just won the lottery!

Our wetland projects have received both local and national attention. In 1994, I was greatly honored to receive the National Wetlands Conservation Award to the private sector. Local awards have included recognition from the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation.

Several documentary films and large publications have featured our wetlands. Readers Digest in 1999 did an article called Champions of the Wild on our sites.

A photographer was dispatched from Los Angeles to take my picture for the article. She asked me to stand in a marsh holding a saddle over one shoulder and a shovel over the other and to look 'stoic'.

Half of the responses concerned wetland and half inquired about stud service, exclusively about Hawk, my Lab.

In all seriousness, public awareness for the Partners Program is essential. Part of that responsibility is owned by cooperates like myself.

There are zillions of people that, like myself, wish to be good stewards of lands and water. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program allow that to happen. It has been a true privilege to be a cooperator in the Partners Program.

I greatly appreciate the time and effort of Johntie Aldrich and everyone at the Tulsa office of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

I hold deep gratitude for the champions of this program, Senator Jim Inhoff is one such champion In part because the Senator understands the program and the need for annual funding.

Thank you.

STATEMENT OF DEBBIE STRAUGHN, PRINCIPAL, DEER CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
EDMOND, OK

Good afternoon Senator, thank you for the opportunity to discuss my involvement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

I am the principal at the Deer Creek Elementary School, which is located in Edmond, Oklahoma. I first became involve with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in 2002, when I contacted Terry Dupree and Jontie Aldrich of the Oklahoma Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program for assistance with my school's Outdoor Classroom. We had contracted with a private vendor to develop a wetland, but it turned out to be a disaster and a liability. We were desperately in need of assistance and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program came to our aid and provided funding and a new wetland design.

To successfully educate young people on our natural resources, Outdoor Classrooms provide the ideal structured learning environment. The teachers and students have taken ownership in our Outdoor Classroom. Our Outdoor Classroom features a gazebo, walkways with animal tracks, artificial nesting structures for wildlife, provides wildlife habitat and provides a interpretive and interactive learning environment.

I want to thank you Senator Inhofe, for supporting the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. I think the technical and financial assistance of the Partner's Program has helped turn our Outdoor Classroom into a wonderful project. This is "one" government program that truly benefits all.

STATEMENT OF VERLENE CHERVANKA, PARTNERS PARTICIPANT, WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST,
AND PROFESSOR, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Good afternoon and thank you Senator Inhofe for the invitation to testify at today's hearing. I am Verlene Chervanka, and own 1,250 acres of property in northwestern Oklahoma near the Sayre, Oklahoma. As the video indicated, I've been involved with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program with other conservation programs for the last 6 years.

I manage my entire ranch for conservation and wildlife. Much of my property operates as a cattle ranch. Another two hundred fifty acres is used for raising wheat. Another part of the property contains natural gas wells with more being planned. I have 315 acres that is dedicated strictly for conservation and wildlife.

Through cost-sharing with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and U.S. Department of Agriculture programs I have invested time and money in these acres and have reaped great rewards. For example, with help and coordination through the Partners Program I have restored 40 acres of wetlands on my property. Since that time this 40 acres has become a refuge for many waterfowl species, shorebirds and wading birds. I also have an osprey that visits my wetland every spring, I guess on its migration back north This 40 acres didn't need to be designated a refuge by the federal or state government. I made the decision to create a refuge on my own property. That is important to me, and that's the kind of assistance that the Partners Program provides. These conservation practices have also turned my property into a sanctuary for wild turkey, as you saw in the video, and deer. Before my involvement in the Partners Program it was rare to find such game at all on my property. In fact, due to the success of the Partners Program on my property, other ranchers in Northwest Oklahoma have become interested and started their own projects.

I also want to especially thank the local Partners Program here in the Fish and Wildlife Service Office in Tulsa. I think it is very important to point out that the success of this program in Oklahoma is due in large part to the director of the Program, Jontie Aldrich. Jontie and his staff has done a great job in establishing a great reputation for the Partners Program in Oklahoma. The Partners team has worked hard to build a reputation of trust between the private landowners and the Partners Program. Landowners know that this Program is not about the federal government coming in and telling you what you can and can't do on your own land. The Partners Program has developed a strong reputation of helping private landowners create habitat. The Program is appropriately named the Partners Program because it is a real partnership of government and private landowners working together. All states should have the great working relationship landowners in Oklahoma have with our Partners Program. I cannot compliment Jontie enough for his work.

STATEMENT OF ANDREW B. MCDANIELS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OKLAHOMA
WILDLIFE FEDERATION

On behalf of the thousands of members and supporters of the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation (OWF), I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Inhofe and Committee members for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act (S. 260). I would also like to express our deepest thanks to Chairman Inhofe for introducing this legislation.

The OWF recognizes the tremendous importance that this legislation will have for hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts in the United States and particularly in Oklahoma and for the future of wildlife.

As Chairman Inhofe has stated, since 1987, the Partners Program has been a successful voluntary partnership program that helps private landowners restore fish and wildlife habitat on their own lands. Through 33,103 agreements with private landowners, the Partners Program has accomplished the restoration of 677,000 acres of wetlands, 1,253,700 acres of prairie and native grasslands, and 5,560 miles of riparian and in-stream habitat.

We also know how popular the Partners Programs has been with sportsmen and women. In a nationwide poll conducted by the National Wildlife Federation by the Republican firm Bellwether Research last June, 87% of America's hunters and anglers said they favored efforts to expand the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program.

OWF also understands that the future of wildlife conservation in states like Oklahoma, where there is very little public land, lies in our ability to successfully partner with private landowners. We know from experience that a majority of private landowners, ranchers and farmers, have a strong conservation ethic and they consider themselves good stewards of the land. Therefore, providing financial assistance to private landowners to restore, enhance, and manage private land to improve fish and wildlife habitats through this legislation is something that the Wildlife Federation in Oklahoma strongly endorses.

Again, we highly commend the proposed legislation. This highly successful program does deserve its own, clear congressional authorization to ensure that it will not be subject to the changing whims of the political climate.

The OWF is Oklahomans oldest conservation organization. For 55 years we have been the voice of sportsmen and outdoor enthusiasts in Oklahoma. OWF is also the state affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation, which is the largest conservation organization in the United States, with over 4 million members and supporters. The mission of the National Wildlife Federation is to inspire Americans to protect wildlife for our childrens future.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

