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"The American Energy Initiative"
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Thank you for the opportunity today to speak about the energy choices facing our nation, and the impact these choices will have not just for our generation but for my children's and those that follow.

I am here today representing National Wildlife Federation's four million members and supporters who are united by our conservation values that transcend political leanings, business interests, and economic differences. We are united by our shared value for clean air and clean water, and for open spaces (from the local park to the western prairies) that are safe havens for wildlife and places where we go to seek solace.

I am here today under the assumption that we all share these values, that we are working together to identify the best course for our country when it comes to the energy choices we make today that will leave a legacy for decades to come. I am working under the assumption that we want our children to inherit a clean and safe planet. And I am working under the assumption that lawmakers will look at what is in the best interest of the American people, and not the select few who are advancing their corporate interests.

But I am concerned that my assumptions may be naïve.

We are at an energy crossroads, and now, more than any other time, is when we need to put politics aside and choose the path that is the morally correct one, that will sustain and grow our economy, that will protect our local water supplies, and that will prevent disastrous climate-related weather events from increasing.

I would like to take a minute to share a personal story of what my neighbors, friends, and family experienced nearly one week ago. I live in Silver Spring, Maryland, and I share a street with elderly residents, immigrants, local business owners, government employees, with Republicans, Democrats, artists, lawyers, and fishermen.

I faced the "derecho" storm with a profound sense of fear for my children. I prayed my kids wouldn't wake, that no tree would fall on my house and that any destruction facing me in the morning would be tolerable. We were lucky. Sadly, my elderly neighbor down the street wasn't. She lost her life when the top half of a giant oak tree crashed through her roof. Police tape, camera crews, and emergency vehicles stood in stark contrast to Pepco's orange tree-removal trucks that dotted the destroyed neighborhood streets.

Remember, 'Thundersnow' from January 2011, when in record time ice and wet snow coated our streets, homes, and trees, shutting down the city?[i] Or Snowmaggedon from winter 2009-2010, when our region got nearly 55 inches of snow over a 3-month period?[ii] Or 2011's Tropical Storm Lee that flooded a good portion of the East Coast, including Fairfax County, VA which sustained as much as $10 million in damages to roads and bridges?[iii] Are these just isolated freak weather events, or a premonition of what the future may hold? Climate scientists and meteorologists are suggesting the latter.

As we know, the damage we've sustained from weather-related disasters is being felt in communities across the country. Fires in Colorado have destroyed over a thousand homes and displaced families, already costing taxpayers $40 million to fight;[iv] and destroying the fragile ecosystem as well. The Poudre River, for example—Colorado's only wild and scenic river outside of Fort Collins—is running black, a toxic mix of ash, debris, and fire retardant.[v]

In Florida, extensive flooding occurred last month when Tropical Storm Debbie deluged parts of the state with an astounding 26 inches of rain over a 72-hour period.[vi]

And remember previous year's weather-related events? The major flooding in the Northeastern US from back-to-back storms?[vii] Or the record-setting heat, drought, and wildfires across Texas?[viii]

The weather extremes affecting the United States and the world are exactly the sorts of climate change impacts that scientists have been projecting for years. And, today, the scientific analysis is proving that climate change is indeed causing more extremes. For example, a recent study by NASA scientist Jim Hansen and colleagues found that the area of the globe experiencing extremely hot summertime temperatures has increased by a factor of 50 and that recent extreme heat waves are very unlikely to have happened in the absence of climate change.[ix]

40,000 heat records have already been broken this year across the United States, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

As of July 3rd, 56.0% of the contiguous U.S. experienced drought conditions, marking the largest percentage of the nation experiencing drought conditions in the 12-year record of the U.S. Drought Monitor.[x]

And while parts of the country are cooking, others are flooding. Iowa, for example, has had four "100-year" flood events in the past 5 years.[xi]

So, here is where we stand at a crossroads: Carbon pollution is changing our climate; and our changing climate is contributing to extreme weather; and in order to slow down this devastating trend, we need to dramatically cut carbon pollution.

This is an urgent matter. We must begin this downward trend by 2020—just eight years from now—if we are to have at least a 2:1 chance of keeping temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees C, the level that scientists and the global community have established as the point of dangerous interference with the climate system.

Yet, our carbon emissions are still on a decidedly upward trajectory. Since 2000, CO_2 emissions derived from human sources have been growing

4 times faster than in the 1990s and are now above the worst case emission scenario of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Faced with these stark climate-changing realities, the National Wildlife Federation is propelled to ignite a national call to move this country, swiftly down an alternate, sustainable, low-carbon fuels path.

Coal to liquids wouldn't be on this path—From well to wheel, CO2 emissions from coal-derived fuel is twice as high as conventional petroleum-derived fuel.

Canadian tar sands wouldn't be on this path—Producing oil from tar sands emits 2-3 times the carbon pollution of conventional oil.

Western oil shale wouldn't be on this path—While still in the R&D phase, it is estimated that retorting oil shale will emit up to two times more greenhouse gas emissions than that from conventionally produced gasoline.[xii]

We're not naïve to think that getting off high-carbon liquid fuels (including conventional oil and gas) will be an easy task—it will require a major overhaul of our car and truck fleet; it will require a major revamping of our public transit systems; it will require a major investment in sustainable, renewable fuels; it will require a major shift in our subsidies structure—to level the playing field between the oil and gas giants and the companies trying to get efficient, renewable technologies into the marketplace.

The good news is that we're making progress.

Corn ethanol has shown what is possible, but it is not the long term answer to our nation's energy needs. We need more support to get us to the next generation of biofuels from non-food, perennial crops and wastes, that create significant greenhouse gas reductions and not lead to other major environmental problems.

New fuel economy standards are essential. Taken together, recent and proposed fuel economy and GHG standards for cars, SUV's, and

pickups, make landmark cuts in carbon pollution: Over 650 million metric tons a year in 2030, about 10% of total US carbon pollution today. The standards – and the renaissance in auto innovation that is coming with them - will also cut our demand for oil by more than we import today from the Persian Gulf, Venezuela and Russia combined.

In addition, steady expansion of electric vehicle technology can take us even further—to a mass market, high performance vehicle fleet that uses little oil and produces near zero pollution.

Deep cuts in the oil we need means less pressure for risky new drilling projects in the Arctic or for clearcutting critical forests in Canada to mine for tar sands oil. It means less need for new pipelines, fewer leaks and threats to people, wildlife, our nation's streams, rivers, and aquifers, and our public and private lands.

Consumers can save money, communities and natural resources will not stand in harm's way of climate-related impacts, and American ingenuity can thrive. But this will only happen if we are bold in our resolve to address the root causes of climate change—the runaway carbon pollution that is generated by our current fossil-intensive fuel mix.

This is the energy vision we need, one that is driven by a determination to address the climate crisis head-on.

National Wildlife Federation looks to you for your leadership at this critically important time, when so many Americans across the country are trying to make sense of what is contributing to these weather extremes; and are eager to learn of the solutions path you will lead them down as you exert your authority and power as lawmakers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this important matter.

[i] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/26/AR2011012608076.html
[ii] http://planetsave.com/2012/02/12/nasa-asks-what-caused-snowmaggedon/
[iii] http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/newsroom/northern_virginia/2011/road_bridge_damage_in54198.asp
[iv] Denver Post, June 28, 2012.
[v] See http://www.coloradoan.com/videonetwork/1724011281001?odyssey=mod|tvideo|newswell
[vi] http://abclocal.go.com/ktrk/story?section=weather/hurricane&id=8709872
[vii] See http://blog.nwf.org/2011/09/climate-change-and-hurricanes-not-just-a-concern-for-coastal-communities/
[viii] See http://blog.nwf.org/2011/10/living-at-the-center-of-the-bulls-eye-drought-heat-and-wildfire-ravage-abilene-texas/
[ix] Hansen, Sato, and Ruedy. (2012). Perceptions of Climate Change: The New Climate Dice. Submitted for publication to the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, PNAS*. http://arxiv.org/abs/1204.1286
[x] http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/national/2012/6
[xi] http://www.fema.gov/news/disasters_state.fema?id=19
[xii] See http://www.westernresourceadvocates.org/land/utosts/fossilfoolishness.pdf. Citation: Adam R. Brandt, "Converting Oil Shale to Liquid Fuels with the Alberta Taciuk Processor: Energy Inputs and Greenhouse Gas Emissions," Energy Fuels 23, no. 12 (2009) 6253–6258, doi: 10.1021/ef900678d, http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/ef900678d.