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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of the Interior's role in responding to catastrophic events and, in particular, our response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

#### Introduction

Mr. Chairman, we join all Americans in expressing our deepest sympathies to those whose lives have been so severely impacted by the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We continue to use our best efforts to assist at all levels of government, Federal, State and local, in the cleanup and restoration efforts along the Gulf coast.

The recent hurricanes both affected Interior's assets and its employees, and generated significant response and recovery efforts by Interior. The Minerals Management Service (MMS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and National Park Service (NPS) all have significant lands, offices, or other assets in the Gulf Region, many of which were directly affected by the hurricanes. In addition, Interior has law enforcement, energy management, scientific, engineering, and other skills and assets used to assist the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), State, and local governments and others in search, rescue, response, and disaster recovery.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, the Federal government's response to providing disaster assistance to state and local governments is the National Response Plan (NRP). The NRP organizes the considerable capabilities of the Federal government around 15 Emergency Support Functions (ESFs). The Department of the Interior provides support to nearly all of these support functions. In addition, the Department is responsible for responding to damage on lands and facilities that we own or manage, and for ensuring the safety of our employees. As appropriate, we invoke our contingency plans to ensure that essential functions of the Department continue in spite of the damage.

Both in preparation for and in the immediate aftermath of the recent hurricanes, FEMA used the National Response Plan, activating the ESFs to provide Federal assistance to the affected states. The Department of the Interior responded to these requests and has provided assistance in five key ESFs: Public Works and Engineering, Firefighting, Oil and Hazardous Materials Response, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Public Safety and Security.

While I will briefly describe the scope of Interior's efforts, two aspects of Interior's post-hurricane role may be especially relevant to this Committee. These two include deployment of our incident command management expertise through the interagency wildland fire program and our expertise in biomass recovery and fire mitigation.

#### National Interagency Incident Management System Overview

When natural disasters occur, an organized and structured response at all levels of government is vital, especially when lives are at risk. The wildland fire community of the Department of the Interior, the USDA Forest Service, and our state and local partners has successfully used such a system for many years in fighting fires. Integral to their success is the National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS), including the Incident Command System (ICS), which provides organizational structures, trained personnel, and common standards for equipment, communication and training.

The Incident Command System allows individuals from different organizations and jurisdictions to quickly form an effective emergency organization by using common terminology, modular organization, management by objectives with a unified action plan, and comprehensive resources management. This system expands or contracts to meet the complexities of an incident and can accommodate large geographic areas, numerous strategies, and multiple interests through a

standardized organizational structure. Using a unified command structure, multiple interests and jurisdictions can coordinate and work together to manage an incident with a single action plan. The overall incident management system provides the underlying preparedness capability for the ICS to function through the establishment of standards for training, qualifications for personnel, equipment standards, and resource ordering and dispatch systems.

The integrity and effectiveness of the NIIMS and ICS were borne out in the response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. For example, one of our Incident Management Teams (an interagency group of Interior and Forest Service personnel) deployed to the New Orleans Airport, engaged parish, local and State fire and police departments, the 82 nd Airborne, and numerous medical facilities to successfully coordinate evacuations of hospitals and those needing medical services unavailable in the area. Preliminary estimates indicated that between 17,000 and 20,000 individuals received assistance through this effort.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), NPS, FWS, and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), along with the Forest Service and state partners, comprise the interagency wildland fire program. Personnel from the fire program are managing mobilization centers and base camps for field hospitals, and receiving and distributing equipment and relief supplies. They are also managing the care, feeding, and logistical support of thousands of relief workers, volunteers, and victims. Two staging areas and seven base camps in Mississippi are operating to provide this support. Multiple staging locations have been established as distribution sites for travel trailers and mobile homes, operating 24 hours per day in fulfillment of this mission.

Although the integrated incident management system and incident command system began in the wildland fire service, this approach has been increasingly used by other agencies, such as the U.S. Coast Guard and many state and local emergency management agencies. In his 2003 directive on Management of Domestic Incidents (HSPD 5), the President called for a national system closely modeled on the wildland fire NIIMS. We will continue to offer to the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies our expertise in adapting the integrated incident management system to national disaster planning, preparedness, and response.

#### Biomass Removal Efforts

The hurricanes damaged or destroyed a wide swath of timber and forest resources across Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. Estimates indicate that 80% of the damage occurred in Mississippi (of that, 65% occurred on private lands, 25% on state lands, and 10% on Federal lands). The Forest Service argues that a 30-35% range of recovery is consistent with the salvage after Hurricane Hugo. A successful bioenergy program could push that rate of recovery higher. The recoverable material is estimated to be sufficient to build 800,000 single family homes and 25 millions tons of paper and paperboard.

The states of Texas, Louisiana, Alabama and especially Mississippi are taking some steps towards forest recovery and energy production from biomass. The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior (Tribes, FWS and NPS) have timbered lands in the affected area.

As DHS coordinates with the states, work on clearing vegetative debris that will open transportation routes, begin rebuilding the electrical distribution infrastructure, and open sites for reconstruction of residences and businesses, other clearing of debris will also reduce fire hazard over broad areas that include much wildland-urban interface. Debris must also be removed to protect and improve wildlife habitat. Additionally, forest damage may lead to insect infestation in the impacted area as well as on adjacent lands. In the short-term, forest industries can use idled equipment and workers to assist in the removal and use of debris. Materials will need to be stored for future milling and processing.

In addition to traditional methods of disposing of cleared debris, the woody debris can also be used in biomass energy production, which can occur at a local level in areas that will reduce demand to the electrical power grid. The National Energy Policy calls for the development of biomass energy.

The USDA and DOI have been in discussion with the state forestry associations of the three states to address this largely private land issue. Critical issues include: how to move the material; how to store it for use over a long term; the capacity to utilize the timber, pulp and bioenergy of the biomass available; whether the material can be economically moved to where it can be used or will it be burned as waste in place.

The current effort is being led by states with strong forestry programs and a long history of hurricane recovery to analyze options for recovery. The Department is working with the Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service to support this effort.

#### The Department's Other Efforts

Prior to the Hurricane Katrina reaching landfall, the Department of the Interior began to prepare for the storm's arrival at the lands and facilities we manage in the Gulf region. National Parks and Wildlife Refuges in coastal areas activated their well-practiced Emergency Action Plans, evacuating visitors and securing facilities for the oncoming storm. As employees withdrew, staging areas were established for Incident Management Teams which were positioned for subsequent re-entry into parks and refuges in the storm's path. BIA law enforcement personnel also pre-positioned teams to provide assessment and immediate support to Tribal communities which would be impacted by Katrina. As the storm track turned to the New Orleans area, the regional headquarters of the MMS activated its Continuity of Operations Plan, relocating key staff to Houston; this staff would again relocate to the MMS offices in Washington when they, like so many other Katrina evacuees, faced the threat of Hurricane Rita as it headed toward the Texas coast. The Department activated its Emergency Management Council, coordinating bureau preparedness and response activities, providing coordination with FEMA and liaison to the Department of Homeland Security's Interagency Incident Management Team, and facilitating the application of resources across bureaus. We also began preparing to respond to FEMA requests for assistance both before and in the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes.

As with any emergency response effort, the first priority was saving lives. Among the first to be affected by the storms were the approximately 25,000 to 30,000 workers employed at off-shore oil and gas facilities scattered throughout the Gulf of Mexico. The MMS, which oversees mineral exploration and development on 1.76 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf, works with the U.S. Coast Guard to ensure safe and clean offshore drilling and production activities. The oil and gas companies were able to safely evacuate every individual before Hurricane Katrina hit. In addition, the MMS regulation proved successful in ensuring that production wells and pipelines were properly shut-in before the storms moved in. These efforts proved largely successful for both hurricanes. All well subsea valves held and there was no equipment failure that could have caused a major oil spill. Within a few days of Hurricane Katrina's wake, using overflights and other information gathering activities, MMS employees assembled and assessed data on the status of oil and gas operations in the Gulf. MMS inspectors performed several overflights of the Gulf activities for a preliminary assessment of the damage and are still working with industry to assess further the structural integrity of pipelines and platforms. The MMS continues to provide oversight to assure that offshore facilities can safely operate before production is resumed.

In addition to MMS's efforts, other agencies within the Department of the Interior have also played a vital role in assisting in hurricane relief and recovery efforts. For example, prior to Hurricane Katrina hitting shore, the BIA dispatched its Mobile Command Vehicle from Florida to Choctaw, Mississippi, and that vehicle served as the Tribe's Mobile Command Center providing satellite communications during telephone and power outages. BIA law enforcement officers worked with the tribal police department to carry out house-to-house searches, brought in food, water, ice, gas and diesel fuel, cleared debris from roadways, and set up shelters to house displaced residents.

In response to FEMA's request for assistance in the area of Public Safety and Security support under ESF #13 of the NRP, the Department's Office of Law Enforcement and Security deployed 43 personnel to provide law enforcement and security at Red Cross shelters and assistance centers and to maintain liaison with the Department of Homeland Security Joint Operations Centers in Baton Rouge and New Orleans. In addition, 111 Law Enforcement personnel were assigned to provide law enforcement on Interior lands and security at ESF #4 staging areas. These Law Enforcement personnel provided mutual aid to neighboring jurisdictions, including St. Bernard's Parish where local law enforcement capability was devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The USGS provided 22 boats and numerous personnel for search and rescue operations, evacuation, and the delivery of food and water. With flooded streets and no visible means to identify and locate residences where trapped individuals remained, search and rescue efforts were helped immeasurably by the aggressive mapping response efforts of the USGS. USGS scientists were able to use a variety of satellite and aerial photography to create links to ground coordinates and provided thousands of pinpoint maps used in responding to 911 calls, guiding search and rescue crews to stranded victims of the flood. Within the first critical week alone, the USGS was able to geocode nearly 7,000 rescues. Thousands of calls were reported in subsequent weeks.

USGS employees in Lafayette, Louisiana, replaced or repaired several damaged stream gauges in the region to restore flood warning capacity and continue to coordinate with other Federal agencies to provide geospatial information, maps, satellite images, and conduct scientific assessments to help response and recovery operations. USGS crews are sampling and testing water in Jackson, Mississippi as well as water pumped out of New Orleans and into Lake Pontchartrain. The USGS National Wetlands Research Center is making daily aerial photo maps--high scale imagery maps used to determine the status of the cities now in the recovery phase.

Aerial video, still photography, and laser altimetry surveys will be used for current and future applications to provide comparisons between pre- and post-storm beach conditions. These data will show the nature, magnitude, and spatial variability of coastal changes, such as beach erosion, overwash deposition, and island breaching, and will help in the refinement

of predictive models of coastal impacts from severe storms. Local, State, and Federal agencies will have access to these data for purposes of disaster recovery and erosion mitigation.

The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) has coordinated the Department's support for the Public Works & Engineering support function led by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The BOR has provided engineering expertise in repairing breaches to Lake Pontchartrain levees and has facilitated communication in the removal of water from New Orleans.

In response to the critical need for uncontaminated water, a water treatment plant, an Expeditionary Unit for Water Purification, was shipped to the area by BOR. Once installed in the parking lot of the Biloxi Regional Medical Center, it has been delivering 80,000 gallons of water per day to that facility. While the City of Biloxi's water system was certified by health officials on September 30, as a safety contingency, the water purification unit continued to produce water through Monday, October 3rd.

To further assist the ESF for Public Works and Engineering, ten missions have been assigned by FEMA: one for water purification; five to assist in the management of temporary roofing in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Biloxi, Mississippi; three for debris monitoring; one for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers support, and one for support and coordination. The BIA, FWS, USGS, BLM, and NPS are providing employees to assist in these efforts.

The NPS is responding with over 400 personnel to assess damage and begin repairs to storm-battered parks including Gulf Islands National Seashore, Dry Tortugas National Park, Big Thicket National Preserve, Cane River Creole National Historical Park, Lyndon Johnson National Historical Park and Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve/New Orleans Jazz National Park. NPS personnel at the Lyndon Johnson National Historical Park are providing assistance to 520 residents of the nearby Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation and to emergency responders in the communities surrounding the park.

FWS employees based at the Big Branch National Wildlife Refuge in Lacombe, Louisiana have been providing public safety assistance and have been removing biomass, clearing roads for emergency access, and providing coordination for the Department. FWS personnel, utilizing flat-bottom boats, provided support to local rescue officials in evacuating stranded residents and provided search and rescue services.

Hurricane Rita left behind a devastated coastline, destroying much prime habitat for several species of native and migratory birds, sea life and mammals. Given the close proximity of these areas to oil and gas operations, with search and rescue operations subsiding, concerns about oil and gas spills are becoming an operational priority. Partnering with the U. S. Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency, the FWS is performing aerial surveys for undetected spills in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas and is proactively performing aerial overflights for potential hazardous debris, looking for displaced above-ground tanks and other hazards along storm surge lines. In southeast Texas, the FWS is working with the Coast Guard on spill response. These efforts are vital to the economic well being of local communities. For example, the FWS coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard on vessel removal is vital to the shrimping industry of coastal Alabama. Assessment of natural resources impacts from the storms is underway. The affected areas include nationally important estuaries and coastal wetlands that protect an internationally significant commercial-industrial area from the destructive forces of storm-driven waves and tides. The FWS and USGS have already begun assessments of the natural resources impacts from the hurricanes, working with other Federal agencies and state agency partners. These areas are also part of a critical ecosystem supporting a substantial portion of the Nation's commercially and recreationally important fisheries.

In response to FEMA's request for emergency support in Agriculture & Natural Resources, the FWS, is partnering with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineer to evaluate the impacts of water pumped from New Orleans into Lake Pontchartrain. As part of this ESF, the NPS and the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service are providing cultural resource and historic properties expertise to the Joint Field Office in Baton Rouge and the National Response Coordination Center in Washington, DC.

## Issues and Challenges

We are currently analyzing the challenges to providing efficient response and recovery support before, during and after national emergencies. Among the issues we are examining is the sufficiency of our procedures for employees and managers to assist state, local, Federal, tribal or private entities when responding to emergencies. As a Department with 70,000 employees and wide-ranging responsibilities, we have a great deal to offer local communities in the form of skilled personnel, equipment, and supplies. In responding to Hurricane Katrina, for example, our personnel from the FWS, USGS and other bureaus assisted search and rescue activities by providing badly-needed boats and trained personnel. The President's Homeland Security Adviser and the Secretary of Homeland Security are both engaged in leading efforts to

examine lessons learned, and determine how the Federal response could be improved for future incidents. The Department is actively participating in this process.

## Conclusion

The road to recovery after these intense storms will be long and, at times, very difficult. However, it is in these instances more than ever that humanity comes together as one to begin the journey toward recovery, rebuilding, and restoration. I am proud of the commitment and dedication shown by the employees of the Department of the Interior during this difficult period. Our resolve to assist in recovery and restoration activities remains strong. We will do all that we can to assist those affected by these storms as they begin the process of rebuilding. Our agency is not alone in this endeavor. We are working shoulder to shoulder with other Federal, State and local agencies in these efforts. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Department's role in disaster response and recovery efforts. I will be happy to answer any questions members of the Committee may have for me.