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STATEMENT OF

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PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

CONCERNING H. R. 1497, the SIKES ACT REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2003

APRIL 10, 2003

Chairman Gilchrest, Ranking Member Pallone, members of the Subcommittee, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding H. R. 1497, the Sikes Act Reauthorization Act of 2003. I will focus my testimony today on the importance, success and future of the Disabled Sportsman's Access Act.

I am Lt. Col. Lew Deal, Director of Outdoor Sports Development for PVA and it is an honor and privilege to be invited to speak before the Subcommittee. PVA is a veterans service organization chartered by the United States Congress with members in all fifty states and Puerto Rico. All of PVA's members are veterans of the armed services and have experienced either spinal cord injury or dysfunction.

Let me begin with a brief overview of the history and background of the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act. As I stated in my testimony of 14 May 1998, the genesis and foundation of the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act (DSAA) began when I read an article in the March 1993 Outdoor Life magazine on sportsmen with disabilities. It occurred to me civilians could hunt at Marine Corps Base (MCB) Quantico but my disabled veteran friends could not. I approached the base commanding general with a plan to rectify this situation. His response was "Make it happen."

The very first organization I contacted was the Paralyzed Veterans of America. Together MCB Quantico and PVA initiated the now highly successful hunting and fishing program for disabled veterans. From this experience I put together a proposal to open all military bases for disabled veterans. As an active duty officer I could not approach Members of Congress with the idea. In 1998 after several years of

Frustration, I approached Tom Saddler of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) with my concept. After reading the proposal he immediately took it to Rep. Duke Cunningham. In October I was invited by CSF to give a presentation on the Quantico program and the national program concept. That month legislation was introduced by Rep. Cunningham and Sen. Conrad Burns (H. R. 2760 and S. 1351, respectively). With a long list of co-sponsors and PVA providing key leadership with recruiting other organizations, support for the legislation quickly grew. In 1998 the Disabled Sportsmen's Access became law.

After retiring from the Marine Corps in 1999 I joined the PVA national staff. Immediately we launched a program to provide military bases with adaptive outdoor sports equipment. PVA views adaptive equipment as the critical bridge between accessibility and participation in traditional outdoor sports for people with disabilities. With generous annual funding support from Anheuser-Busch the list of military installations receiving adaptive equipment continues to steadily grow. To date PVA has donated various types of adaptive equipment outdoor sports equipment (pontoon boats, popup ground blinds, and elevating stands) to the following bases: Fort Hood, TX; Camp Lejeune, NC; Eglin AFB, FL; Fort A.P. Hill, VA; Fort Leonard Wood, MO; Fort Sill, OK; Little Rock AFB, AR; NAS Meridian, MS; NWS Yorktown, VA; Redstone Arsenal, AL; and MCB Quantico, VA.

In 2003 PVA has plans for additional equipment donations to Fort Bragg, NC; Fort Benning, GA; and MacDill AFB, FL. PVA also worked with MCB Quantico, VA in the construction of a fully accessible fishing facility. This site was named the "Sgt. Joe Fox Fishing Facility" in honor of PVA's current National President. As directed by the DSAA this equipment is available for use in the following order: disabled veterans, military dependents with disabilities, and all other people with disabilities. The DSAA, coupled with the adaptive equipment donations, is having a significant, positive effect on the "quality of life" for thousands of disabled citizens across the country. Last fall at the NWS Yorktown PVA equipment donation ceremony, Rep. Jo Ann Davis stated: "I can't imagine not being able to enjoy the outdoors. I think this Huntmaster is a step toward changing that for disabled veterans. With the help of this stand, they will be able to break down one more barrier".

PVA will gladly and enthusiastically continue to support the DSAA and provide adaptive outdoor equipment as needed. However, PVA has one request. We would like to work with the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Environment and Installations on streamlining the procedures for adaptive equipment donations to military installations. A uniformed set of approved procedures accepted by each service branch would be extremely helpful. It is essential that the Disabled Sportsman's Access Act be reauthorized as you consider the broader reauthorization of the Sikes Act.

In closing, PVA would like to thank those in Congress who have support this historic law. As we all know, thousands of our military men and women are around the world going "in harm's way" defending our way of life. For those who will pay a heavy price for our freedom and come home to live with that sacrifice everyday, the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act and the opportunities it provides should be there for them. Representative Duke Cunningham said it best with his comment on the DSAA: "This is just one small thing we can give back to those who gave so much for their country."

This concludes my statement, on behalf of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, I again thank you for this opportunity to testify about the success and promise of the Disabled Sportsman's Access Act. I will please to respond to any questions you may have.