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Opening Statement of
Chairman John Fleming
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 2208, H.R. 2798 and H.R. 2799
Friday, August 2, 2013 at 9:30 AM

Good morning, today, the Subcommittee will conduct a hearing on three bills.

The first bill, H. R. 2208, was introduced by our distinguished Committee colleague from Virginia, Congressman Rob Wittman. This proposal will extend the existing North American Wetlands Conservation program for an additional five years.

Since its enactment nearly fifteen years ago, the North American Wetlands Conservation Program has acquired, conserved, enhanced, protected and restored nearly 30 million acres of wetlands in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The greatest number of wetlands in the lower 48 states are located in the State of Louisiana. Louisiana also has the highest rate of coastal wetland or marsh loss in North America. In fact, we lose 25 to 35 square miles or 22,000 acres of wetlands each year.

It has been estimated that for every 2.7 miles a hurricane travels across wetlands, the storm surge is reduced by one foot. The wetlands in the Gulf of Mexico provided an important barrier and assisted in saving human lives and property when Louisiana was devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

I am interested in finding out how the North American Wetlands Conservation Program works, how it has historically been funded, and if any reforms may be needed in the midst of the current fiscal environment.

Our next bill deals with commercial filming fees on public lands. Public Law 106-206 authorized the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to establish a fee system for commercial filming on public lands. H.R. 2798 would amend the law to create a special rule for permits and fees for film crews of 5 persons or less on public lands that are open to the public and under the jurisdiction of the two Departments.

H. R. 2799 was introduced by the leadership of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus. It will establish in law a Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council Advisory Committee to provide meaningful input to the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior from the hunting and fishing communities.

I look forward to hearing witness testimony and discussing each of these bills before us today.

I am now pleased to recognize the Acting Ranking Member, Congresswoman Bordallo, for any statement she would like to make.