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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement by
The Honorable John Fleming
Chairman, Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
At the Oversight Hearing in Shreveport, Louisiana on Giant Salvinia
June 27, 2011

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to Louisiana State University's Shreveport campus. I am pleased to be hosting this Congressional Hearing with my good friend and colleague from Tyler, Texas, Congressman Louie Gohmert. We both want to thank LSU for allowing us to utilize this beautiful auditorium and for all of the assistance that we received in making this important hearing come together.

The purpose of today's hearing is to obtain testimony on efforts to control and eradicate one of the worst invasive weeds in the world. Native to Brazil, Giant Salvinia has been devastating to both Lake Caddo and Bistineau. Long before I was elected to Congress, I have been aware of the Giant Salvinia problem. My hometown of Minden, sits along the north bank of Lake Bistineau and has faced the detrimental effects of Giant Salvinia to the community at large. Let me share with the audience some brief descriptions of this nasty invasive plant.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has recently issued a publication that states: "Put simply, invasives can kill a lake, and Giant Salvinia is the worst of the lot." Former Eagles band and Caddo Lake Institute Founder, Don Henley, reminds us that: "It's probably the most dire threat that the lake has ever faced." And, Dr. Randy Westbrook of the United States Biological Services has noted that: "Giant Salvinia plants do not die quickly. In fact, they can live a few days or even a couple of weeks out of water."

It is, therefore, not surprising that Giant Salvinia has been "officially banned" in the United States by its inclusion on the Federal Noxious Weed List and that it is a state crime to distribute, possess, sale or transport this rootless, aquatic, invasive fern in both Louisiana and Texas.

The good news is that no one has ignored this problem and allowed this menace to destroy Caddo Lake, Lake Bistineau and other freshwater bodies of water. Through the combined efforts of federal, state, local and non-governmental organizations like the Bistineau Task Force and the Caddo Lake Institute, there has been a comprehensive effort to control and eradicate Giant Salvinia. These efforts have literally saved these lakes from becoming giant "dead zones" and thousands of our neighbors are able to continue to enjoy boating, fishing and recreating on these waters.

The fight to eradicate Giant Salvinia will be a long and arduous battle. Once an invasive species has become established it is difficult, if not impossible, to completely remove it. There is no silver bullet to kill Giant Salvinia. What we know, however, is that its biomass can double in size in a week or ten days and that its expanded mats of vegetation degrades fishing habitat, decreases water quality, creates unsafe boating and fishing access and threatens property values. We will continue to contain this invasive species by utilizing a number of different strategies including simple things like making absolutely sure that once a boat is removed from a lake, the boat owner does not allow Giant Salvinia to hitchhike home.

We have asked today's witnesses to share with us their thoughts on where we are in the fight against Giant Salvinia, what control or eradication strategies have worked and at what costs, whether we can develop a more weather resistance weevil and how we can finance these efforts in the future.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses including two elected representatives from Louisiana and Texas. I am now pleased to recognize Congressman Louie Gohmert for whatever time he would like to use.