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Government Should Not Increase Hunting Costs During Recession In Order to Buy More Private Land

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Tomorrow, the House Natural Resources Committee is scheduled to hold a markup of the *Migratory Bird Treaty Act Penalty and Enforcement Act of 2009* (H.R. 1916). This bill would increase the cost of the federal duck stamp (used as a hunting permit) from \$15 to \$25 in 2010 and to \$35 in 2020 (more than doubling the cost). All the proceeds would be used by the federal government to acquire more private land.

Republicans on the Committee have expressed numerous concerns about increasing the cost of the duck stamp during difficult economic times and spending millions of taxpayer dollars to buy more private land for the federal government.

Republican Concerns with H.R. 1916:

- **Mandates Funds for Federal Government Acquisition of Private Land**

Under this bill, all the proceeds from the duck stamp increase must be spent on mandatory land acquisition and cannot go towards any other beneficial purpose. Given the historic \$1 trillion Obama-Pelosi budget deficit, now is not the time for the government to use scarce taxpayer dollars to buy even more land.

The federal government is already spending millions on land acquisition. Just last month, the House of Representatives approved the Interior Appropriations bill that provided \$120 million for the Fish and Wildlife Service's land acquisition efforts. Even without the \$10 dollar duck stamp increase next year, the Fish and Wildlife Service will have over \$142 million to buy private property – a \$35 million increase above the current year level.

In addition, the federal government cannot properly manage the land they currently own. The National Wildlife Refuge System currently has a \$2.6 billion operations-and-maintenance backlog with 3,348 "mission critical" projects pending completion. Those who hunt on our national wildlife refuges are experiencing overgrown trails, out of control invasive species, decaying roads and a growing number of refuges that are either closed to the public or are operated by a handful of Fish and Wildlife Service staff. The Fish and Wildlife Service should properly manage the resources it has before buying more private land.

- **Raises the Cost of Hunting During Economic Recession**

As unemployment nears 10 percent and families struggle to make ends meet during this serious recession, Americans cannot afford to pay more than double for a duck hunting permit.

According to data by the Fish and Wildlife Service, the number of waterfowl hunters who purchase a Federal duck stamp has declined by more than 25 percent since 1975. Increasing the cost of hunting will only accelerate this decline and discourage people from hunting.

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