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Opening Statement by
Chairman John Fleming
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
Legislative Hearing on H. R. 358, H. R. 709, H. R. 1818, H. R. 2158 AND H. R. 2463
On Thursday, July 25, 2013 at 10:00 AM
1324 Longworth House Office Building

Today we will hear testimony on a number of bills - two of which deal with the problem of Asian carp in the Mississippi River basin. The Natural Resources Committee has primary jurisdiction over H.R. 358, the Strategic Response to Asian Carp Invasion Act, introduced by Congresswoman McCollum of Minnesota, and sequential jurisdiction over H.R. 709, the Upper Mississippi Conservation and River Protection Act of 2013, introduced by Congressman Ellison also of Minnesota. I welcome both of the sponsors to the hearing today and look forward to their testimony.

I understand the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has an interest in both of these bills due to the involvement of the Army Corps of Engineers in Asian carp control issues. I understand that Committee may have some concerns with both pieces of legislation so I look forward to hearing more about the bills and working with both the sponsors of the legislation and the Transportation Committee.

We will also hear testimony on H.R. 1818, the Polar Bear Conservation and Fairness Act of 2013, introduced by the gentlemen from Alaska, Mr. Young. The legislation would allow around 40 hunters to import their polar bear trophies into the U.S. from Canada.

Prior to the threatened listing of the polar bear under the Endangered Species Act on May 15, 2008, American hunters could hunt a polar bear from an approved Canadian polar bear population and import their trophy into the U.S. The listing of the polar bear ended these trophy imports.

The legislation is pretty simple. It would amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to issue permits for the importation of a limited number of polar bear trophies that were legally taken before the May 2008 listing.

The hunters covered by the bill legally hunted and fully complied with all U.S. and Canadian laws in place at the time. H.R. 1818 will allow qualified hunters to import their trophies, with the permit fees going toward polar bear conservation activities in the U.S. and Russia.

The next bill, H. R. 2463, is a bipartisan measure introduced by Congressmen Duncan Hunter of California and Tim Walz of Minnesota. This legislation will amend the Pittman-Robertson Act to allow states to use a greater portion of their allocated funds to construct and maintain public target ranges.

As this country has become increasingly urbanized, the number of state hunting license holders has declined from 16.7 million in 1982 to 14.9 million. Nevertheless, two of the greatest challenges facing these hunters is the lack of adequate public hunting lands and shooting ranges. H. R. 2463 is a serious effort to address this lack of practice facilities, it is an appropriate modification to the Pittman-Robertson Program and we can make this change without any cost to our taxpayers.

Finally, the last bill, is H. R. 2158, the Expedited Departure of Certain Snake Species Act. Under the Lacey Act, it is perfectly legal to breed, possess, move in intrastate commerce or export a species listed as "injurious wildlife". Prior to March 23, 2012, the exportation of a listed species was not an issue. There are simply no trade or interest in acquiring those listed species. However, on that day, four of the nine proposed constrictor snakes were listed as "injurious" and the impact of this decision on the \$2 billion dollar industry was staggering.

Those who still legally own Burmese pythons are interested in recouping some of their lost financial investment and they want to legally export these snakes outside of the United States. The removal of these snakes is a goal we all share. Sadly, this process has become extremely difficult because the Fish and Wildlife Service has ruled that any stop in the United States for emergency repairs, fuel or passengers is interstate commerce.

The reality is that if you want to ship a Burmese python from Miami International Airport to Asia, you must stop at the Ted Stevens International Airport in Anchorage, Alaska for fuel. In this case, the snakes do not leave the cargo hold of the plane and they are covered by an international airway bill. If you want to ship a Burmese python from California to Europe, then you are going to stop at JFK in New York or the Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey.

My bill, H. R. 2158, is a simple narrow fix to the Lacey Act. It only affects the export of these four nonnative species, it is restricted to commercial airlines, they can only be shipped from 17 wildlife ports designated by the Fish and Wildlife Service, their transit must end no later than 48 hours after leaving the United States, it does not alleviate the need to obtain appropriate CITES permits, to pay all export permit fees and wildlife inspection fees and it will ensure that all state laws are complied with prior to departure.

During the past year, we have seen the State of Florida have the famous Python Challenge in South Florida and statewide snake amnesty days. If we want to continue the process of removing these listed snakes then we should be encouraging, not discouraging or stopping, their expedited removal. This is the fundamental goal of my legislation.