

My name is Charlotte Kelley. My husband and I own a cotton gin in Tipton County, Tennessee. I am a former Tipton County Commissioner and I come here today about the Chickasaw and Lower Hatchie Refuge Expansion Plan.

Detriment to our County Economy

My first concern is the economic effect to Tipton County and to production agriculture. Production agriculture is the engine of our county's economy. Each year agriculture pumps close to \$115 million into our economy. The loss of approximately 38,000 acres to U.S. Fish and Wildlife in Tipton County would be a loss of around \$40 million annually. One-fourth of our commercial agriculture would be taken out of production. Farmland in our county generates on average \$8.13 per acre in land taxes. In lieu of property taxes Federal Revenue Sharing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife has been purported to be \$3.73 per acre but historical data from a neighboring county show it to be in the \$2.60 per acre range and decreasing yearly.

Personal Business Concerns

My personal business concerns are paramount to my being present today. If the Chickasaw and Lower Hatchie initiative is successful, we can reasonably say that our business could lose up to one-half of our revenue due to a large portion of revenue coming from areas in the proposed plan. Graineries

and seed cleaning operations would also suffer great losses. Among others to exponentially lose revenue would be agricultural suppliers, parts businesses, banks, car dealers, “Mom & Pop” merchants, charities, schools and a significant loss of agriculturally related jobs.

Heavy Hand of U.S. Fish and Wildlife

My third concern is of utmost importance. You see, our local landowners who have experience with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife have been impacted negatively. Owning land adjacent to U.S. Fish and Wildlife is daunting to private land owners. These encounters are quite similar to those we hear about on the news concerning the GSA, IRS, and NSA. There are existing documented court cases which show the aggressive behavior of U.S. Fish and Wildlife. I fear greatly that land will be acquired in “checker board” fashion and the “hold out” landowners will be subjected to intimidation by U.S. Fish and Wildlife. Three individuals in my community have spent in excess of \$150,000.00 litigating against U.S. Fish and Wildlife in order to secure the original property boundaries, to re-establish egress/ingress to their property and to use their privately owned land for personal hunting purposes. The actions of USFW appear to be attempts to passively force these landowners out.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife also alter the land in a manner that limits drainage to the point that adjacent private lands will be flooded and most likely deemed “wetlands”. When these “wetlands” are no longer tillable, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife have a greater likelihood of then acquiring the flooded lands.

Another concern is that private landowners will be subjected to increased wildlife protection enforcement as a result of simply being adjacent to or upstream from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife lands.

How will these bottomlands be changed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife and what effects will these changes have on private land owners? How will it affect proper drainage, canals, roads, ditches, and pesticide use? Historically in our area, we have seen U.S. Fish and Wildlife more concerned about the private use of their land than how to properly maintain the refuge for public recreational use and to prevent harm to other nearby landowners.

Our nation is 17 trillion dollars in debt and agencies such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife are creating these massive land grabs that will cost our country billions. Should we not divert the use of these funds to repaying our debt? The Chickasaw & Lower Hatchie

Refuge Expansion is just one of many land acquisition initiatives that should be put on hold until our financial house is in order.

I am neither a zealot nor an extremist. As a business woman, county resident, wife, mother, and grandmother, I only wish to call attention to an agency that can destroy an economy, and the jobs and livelihood of several rural counties in West Tennessee.

One question keeps coming to mind. Are the wishes of a group of environmentalist more important than the lives and livelihood of several thousands of people in rural West Tennessee?