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Owner of Clouds Gallery
Chincoteague Island, VA**

**Testimony on the Proposed Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Chincoteague
National Wildlife Refuge.**

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My name is Nancy Payne. I'm a Chincoteague Island resident and business owner. For 23 years my husband, Randolph, and I have run an open-in-the-summertime art gallery at the corner of Maddox and Main Streets.

Our first property purchase on the Island was in 1979 when we bought a house located on Circle Drive and which we still own. During this time, our working years, we were both Alexandria-based teachers and free to live elsewhere during the summers. We looked at several places to find a safe summer environment for our only child who was 5 years old at the time.

Chincoteague and Assateague Islands filled all these requirements. She rode her bike, swam in the ocean, had plenty of fresh air and room to grow. As she grew older our family's needs began to change and in 1987 we bought the commercially zoned house and property at 4296 Main Street, opened an art gallery to sell work we produce. In the year 2000 we sold our home in Alexandria, Virginia and moved to Chincoteague and became residents. In the meantime our daughter married, had a baby and moved to Salisbury, Maryland. We now have a second home there where we spend about five winter months each year.

In addition to running a business, I'm a Precinct Captain and Election Official. Ten years ago another person and I organized a group of about 12 volunteers to give summertime Island history tours four times per week to provide additional recreational and educational opportunities for our tourists. The Town's trolleys are used and ticket sales money donated to the Town.

Issues facing us at this hearing today center on the geographic locations of Assateague and Chincoteague Islands. They are close in miles but each has very different needs, objectives and goals. One's primary purpose as a National Refuge is to protect the wildlife and fragile land mass that is literally at the edge of the eastern shore. On Chincoteague individuals, business owners and private landowners are the stakeholders and many in the population rely on money generated from the tourist who sleep, eat and shop on our island but go to Assateague for outdoor recreation. Issues arising around these differences can create awkward situations.

For the last year and a half, Assateague's 15 year Comprehensive Conservation Plan has been debated. Refuge personnel have held advertised-in-advance meetings that were well attended. Many letters and articles appeared in newspapers and an enormous number of private discussions have taken place. During public presentations the full range of alternatives for consideration were talked about generating a great deal of discussion. Audience members asked many questions which were thoroughly answered; graphics and charts explaining the alternatives

served as backdrops for the speaker and a six page, well-designed brochure illustrating and explaining the four Alternatives handed out. (I attended three of these meetings.)

After careful listening, studying and thinking about the plans I concluded: Plan A: The 'do nothing' alternative is not a viable option since existing parking would inevitably be washed away. It is essential to make plans now and not allow this to happen. Barrier islands, as we all know, naturally shift and change and people who use them for recreation or their source of income must make adjustments to these easily predictable changes. Plan C: Advocates allowing natural succession and coastal processes to take place with little intervention allowing natural disturbances to occur meaning parking lots would be shut down after storms damaged them and no shuttle to the beach provided causing visitors to leave since they would not be able to get to the beach via their own vehicles. This plan would not bode well for Chincoteague's tourism economic base. Plan D: Staffing and funding would be directed towards maximizing habitat and wildlife management with the result being public use activities and access may be reduced. Again, not good for Chincoteague's economic well being.

As business owners we know it's essential for visitors to get to the beach even when parking lots are not usable due to storm damage making a shuttle system essential. We were so convinced that Plan B was the best solution that last summer I wrote a petition supporting Plan B and we along with Hal and Claire Lott, also business owners, circulated it among our customers and friends. Only business owners or residents or property owners were asked to sign. It stated: " PETITION OF SUPPORT TO THE ASSATEAGUE REFUGE: FOR MOVING 961 PARKING SPACES TO NORTH ON ISLAND, FOR PURCHASE OF MADDOX FAMILY CAMPGROUND. Signers of this petition support the plan by the Refuge to move and maintain 961 parking spaces to a more sheltered and secure Assateague location. They also endorse their plan to purchase the off-Assateague Island Maddox Family Campground for the following reasons: to be available as an alternative in case the beach parking lots are lost due to a summer storm or hurricane, to provide the capability of emergency parking and for supplemental parking with a shuttle service to the beach area."

Claire passed along her signed copies to me and I sent 57 signatures to Lou Hinds. A few other people asked to have petitions but were to send them directly to the Refuge. My conservative guess is that at least 65 signatures were generated. (A blank copy is provided for the record.)

During the last meeting I attended Lou Hinds went into more detail about the Maddox Campground which, if bought, would continue to be used for camping but run by the Refuge with only two week permits issued creating a tourist turn over that would potentially produce more Chincoteague business dollars. In addition, personally, I strongly believe that all levels of economic income should be able to afford a beach experience and having a safe, clean camping facility that is very close to the beach area would add another dimension to Chincoteague's clientele. I can envision youth groups, from churches, Boy and Girl Scouts, schools on field trips, all camping there and using a shuttle to go back and forth to the beach.

Assateague's 37 miles long coast line provides a vast amount of space for people and at least one of these meeting Mr. Hinds also make it clear that there is additional room on the beach for more people than can be transported there by 961 vehicles. Again making a strong case for a shuttle

for those who either don't want to be bothered parking on the beach or for those who can't get there because the 961 spaces are filled.

As to the fear expressed by some - - that the Refuge would bait-and-switch by building a parking lot on the Maddox Campground, start a shuttle system for emergency use and then get rid of all parking on Assateague - - that seems to me to be over reaching in use of 'suspicion.' The Refuge is not tucked away in some remote area where such a devious trick could possibly be successful. It is known around the world, has been visited by millions of people and is very near major metropolitan cities, which are the home bases for a massive number of people. If the Fish and Wildlife Service were to go back on its word by forbidding parking on Assateague and use only shuttle buses going from the Maddox Family Campground an extremely large number of people would have a collective fit and an "Occupy Assateague" movement would take place. But I don't expect this to happen. I feel strongly that the Refuge has been honest, open and considerate by not only focusing on their needs but also those of their neighbors on Chincoteague. They are fully aware of their position in this fragile alliance and the economic ramifications their actions could cause to Chincoteague's well-being and economic bottom line.

Other people and I agree, on this issue. I quote one of them from a 14 July 2011 article printed in the local BEACON newspaper with the title reading:

BEACH ACCESS, PRESERVATION ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE GOALS
"I want to be very clear that I have no issue with the Maddox family selling their land. Furthermore, I do not take issue with the idea of having a backup parking site for temporary parking in the event that a storm washes out the current parking lot. I do not dispute the possibility that such a storm could occur or that an off-site, backup option could help mitigate the economic damage the town would suffer for however long it may take to rebuild the parking lot." The writer goes on to say in another paragraph. "However, I will not support any plan that relies on a transit system as the primary means accessing the beach or that decreases the number of parking spaces within walking distance of the beach."

The writer and the person with whom I agree is Representative Scott Rigell who has apparently requested this meeting. Had I known his views at the time I would have asked him to sign our petition! (Copy submitted for the record.)

The natural assets of Assateague are irreplaceable and I strongly respect the current policy that the recreational beach will not be replenished and dune habitat will not be actively maintained. To do so would simply be a waste of money since this would have to be constantly redone after storms did their damage. Better to put money in a real asset such as the entire Maddox Family Campground which has a consistent land mass and could be used in many different ways.

The Town and the Refuge mean a great deal to our family and to us. It is extremely rewarding to see our 9-year-old granddaughter having the same basic growing up experiences her mother had on these two very special Islands. For the mental and economic well being of all concerned I trust a more agreeable, thoughtful, respectful atmosphere will be nourished between the leaders of these two national treasures, their differences resolved and a pleasant working agreement established.