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Opening Statement of
Chairman John Fleming
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
On Thursday, April 25, 2013
1334 Longworth House Office Building Full Committee Legislative Hearing on
H.R. 638, H.R. 1300 and H.R. 1384

Good afternoon, Today, we will hear testimony on several legislative proposals.

We will begin with H. R. 1300, which has been introduced by our distinguished Committee colleague from New Jersey, Congressman Jon Runyan. His proposal will extend the refuge volunteers programs that were first enacted fifteen years ago. By any objective standard, these programs, which were authored by a former Chairman of this Subcommittee, Congressman Jim Saxton, have been a resounding success.

While Americans have been volunteering to assist the refuge system since the first unit was established in 1903, the value of their service has dramatically increased. In fact, volunteers now donate more than 1.7 million hours of their time each year, they operate refuge visitor centers throughout the country and the financial value of their hard work translates to \$37 million. In short, volunteers are critical to the operation of the refuge system and the 44 million people who visit one or more units each year.

We are also going to examine H. R. 1384, which directs the U. S. Postal Service to issue a semipostal stamp that will contribute to the operation of the national wildlife refuge system. With an operations and maintenance backlog in excess of \$3 billion, this proven funding mechanism has no cost to the taxpayer and could help focus resources where they are sorely needed.

Finally, I want to encourage my colleagues to support H. R. 638, the National Wildlife Refuge Review Act. It may have made sense to allow President Theodore Roosevelt to establish the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge 110 years ago when the national debt was \$2.2 billion. However, with a national debt of \$16.8 trillion and growing, it is time for the Congress to exercise its constitutional responsibility to safeguard the hard earned tax dollars of our constituents.

Since 2000, the Fish and Wildlife Service has administratively established more than 30 national wildlife refuges. These units are comprised of millions of acres of property and the cost of acquiring them will be billions of dollars.

Under current law, the Fish and Wildlife Service can create a new refuge regardless of cost, size or local public support without any input from the Congress. Yet, by creating these refuges, they place the Congress and more importantly the taxpayers of the United States on the hook for these huge land acquisition costs.

What I am suggesting in H. R. 638 is not a new idea. In fact, 56 refuges have been legislatively created. In addition, every new National Park, Wilderness Area, National Forest, Wild and Scenic River, National Heritage Area, National Conservation Area, or a unit of the Coastal Barrier Resources System requires an Act of Congress.

Yet, in the past two years, the Service has administratively established two new refuges in Florida and Kansas which will when completed have more than 1 million acres of land and a price tag in excess of \$1 billion.

While I understand that the Fish and Wildlife Service may find this requirement to be inconvenient, burdensome or make them less nimble, I will continue to fight for this policy change because it is the right thing to do. In fact, by having such an authorization, a new refuge will have a Congressional Seal of Approval and I suspect it would be easier and not harder to obtain financial support in the future. This is the lesson of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge, which is in my Congressional District, and which was legislatively created in 2002.