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**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

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**Opening Statement by**  
**The Honorable John Fleming**  
**Chairman, Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs**  
**At the Oversight Hearing on the FY'13 Budget Request**  
**for NOAA, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Office of Insular Affairs**  
**March 6, 2012**

Good morning, today, we will hear testimony from representatives of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Office of Insular Affairs.

Before getting into the details of each of these budgets, I cannot help but reflect upon the millions of Americans who as they sit at their kitchen table trying to balance their family budget, must wonder when the federal government will ever get serious about reducing our staggering debt. When Barack Obama became our 44<sup>th</sup> President, our national debt was \$10.6 trillion. Today, in just three years, that debt has skyrocketed to \$15.4 trillion. And for those who are keeping track, it took this nation over 210 years to reach a debt of \$5 trillion and in less than four years, we have nearly matched that level of indebtedness.

As a result of this irresponsible spending, every man, woman and child in the United States now owns \$49,380 of that debt — which is a level even higher than Greece which has been teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. The fundamental difference, however, is that unlike Greece, it is highly unlikely that the European Community or any other international organization would be willing to bail out the United States.

After examining these budgets, it is clear that none of them reflect the reality of our current economic situation. Each of them propose an increase over last year's appropriated levels and they are frankly not serious documents.

In terms of the Fish and Wildlife Service, this year's request looks eerily similar to FY'12. Once again, the Service has asked for more than \$100 million for land acquisition but cuts nearly \$6 million for the operations and maintenance of 556 national wildlife refuges and 71 national fish hatcheries and no money for the Refuge Revenue Sharing Program. If the Congress were to agree, then the Service could buy an additional 85,000 acres of private land, the operations and maintenance backlog would continue to grow and communities who have lost tax revenues when private property was incorporated within the refuge system would be told to get lost.

I am also interested in hearing why the Fish and Wildlife Service has recommended that \$200 million in offshore revenues which belong to Gulf Coast States under the Energy Policy Act of 2005 should be permanently cancelled.

Office of Insular Affairs funds are intended to support the insular areas in developing financial self-sufficiency. Overall, the President's budget request for the Office of Insular Affairs is an increase of \$4 million. However, the request states that only \$60 million of the Office of Insular Affairs budget is discretionary and the overall discretionary funding levels included a \$16.5 million decrease. In fiscal year 2013, the insular areas will be dealing with budget cuts and similar to other areas in the U.S. will have to do more with less.

Economic down turns are difficult for everyone and require oversight of programs and hard choices to be made when funding levels are cut. Annual oversight hearings provide the Subcommittee with the opportunity for updates on the use of federal funds. I am interested to hear about the Office of Insular Affairs progress in promoting self-sufficiency in the insular areas through financial and technical assistance. How the use of federal funds has encouraged private sector economic development, promoted sound financial management practices in the insular governments and how federal funds have been used to respond to the unique needs of the island communities.

And finally, the NOAA budget. While I continue to have serious concerns with the big-picture priorities this budget request supports, I must give you some credit for having listened to this committee over the last few years. While the overall NOAA budget would increase by 3 percent, the satellite program once again increases by almost 9 percent while fisheries program decrease by almost 2 percent. If you look at the changes in funding levels from Fiscal Year 2008 to this budget request, the satellite programs are increased by almost 114 percent. This level of funding is unsustainable and is affecting the quality of research available to fishery managers.

While you continue to provide large funding levels for just a few satellite programs, you have never funded a stock assessment on the Atlantic sturgeon. Because of the recent sturgeon uplisting, which was based on very limited and inconclusive data, as many as 42 different east coast fisheries may now face restrictions. Until satellites can count fish from space, funding for stock surveys and assessments is absolutely essential to maintaining coastal jobs.

I am also concerned that the funding level for the Regional Fisheries Management Councils and the Interstate Fisheries Commissions are not a priority. These Councils and Commission provide critical state and public involvement in the fisheries management process. At a time when Annual Catch Limits are being debated and adjusted for our fisheries, public involvement is even more important than ever. Limiting staff for the Councils or cutting back on meetings will do nothing to further this Administration's goals of public involvement and transparency.

As you know, Members of this committee have concerns with the imposition of catch share programs - especially on the east coast and in the Gulf of Mexico. We continue to have concerns with this level of funding and will request more information on how this level of funding will be used - particularly whether this funding will be used to advocate for new catch share programs where they are not welcome.

Having pointed out a few concerns, let me point out a few good things in this budget request. I am pleased that this budget request zeroes out the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program. As Members of this Committee have repeated over and over to a number of federal agencies, it makes no sense for the federal government to continue to buy more and more land when it cannot maintain the land it already owns. I see that you have gotten the message. Please help us get the message across to other federal agencies.

In addition, I note that you have consolidated a number of the NOAA education programs. While I am sure all of our Members support education, the majority of the NOAA education programs were created by earmarks and did not have statutory authorization.

I am also pleased that you have not requested funding for the Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning Initiative. I know you are well aware of this Committee's concerns with the scope and potential impact of this federal zoning exercise. While I am pleased there is no request for this initiative, I hope that this does not mean that the initiative is moving forward under the radar by stealing funding from other missions and duties of the agencies and without Congressional authorization.

As I noted earlier, I still have many concerns with the direction of the overall NOAA budget request and the priorities it represents. More funding needs to be directed toward fisheries research or this Nation's fishing industry and the coastal communities supported by these industries will be adversely affected.