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Opening Statement By
The Honorable John Fleming
Chairman, Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
At The Legislative Hearing on Various Legislative Proposals
October 25, 2011

Good afternoon. Today, the Subcommittee will hold a legislative hearing on seven bills that affect the Fish and Wildlife Service and a few of these bills have the potential to save taxpayers money. At the appropriate time, I will recognize members of the Committee who have sponsored several of these measures.

The first two bills, H. R. 2027 and H. R. 2154, make modifications to the John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System. Since this system was established in 1984, it has saved billions of taxpayer dollars. Historically the maps were hand drawn, and on occasion Congress has been asked to correct honest mapping mistakes that are adversely affecting homeowners who should never have been incorporated within the System. These two bills appear to meet that criterion.

The third bill, H. R. 2236, was introduced by our Ranking Member, Congressman Gregorio Sablan. It has been cosponsored by 46 Members of the House, including myself, and it would create an innovative way to raise funds for the ever increasing operations and maintenance backlog within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The fourth bill, H. R. 2714, would amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act to allow Alaskan natives to more broadly utilize Northern sea otter pelts legally taken in subsistence hunts from the non-listed populations in Alaska.

The next bill, H. R. 2719, was introduced by our Full Committee Chairman and it would allow public access to the summit of Rattlesnake Mountain which is located within the Hanford Reach National Monument in the State of Washington.

The sixth bill, H. R. 3117, would make permanent the ability of a migratory waterfowl hunter to electronically purchase their annual federal duck stamp. This is an important technological advancement.

Finally, we will hear testimony on H. R. 3009, a bill I introduced to require that any new National Wildlife Refuge must be authorized by Congress. In my own State of Louisiana, seven of the twenty-three refuges were legislatively created including the Red River National Wildlife Refuge in my Congressional District. In fact, this refuge is the model that I envision in the future.

From the day my distinguished predecessor, Congressman Jim McCreary, introduced his bill to establish the Red River unit through Congressional hearings, markups, floor debate and Presidential bill signing, exactly six months passed. There is no one who can objectively argue that this was an arduous process or that somehow the establishment of this refuge was delayed. Quite the contrary, this process ensured that this proposed refuge was carefully reviewed and that Congress and the public supported its creation.

The requirement contained within H. R. 3009 is neither new nor radical.

As my colleagues well know, it requires an Act of Congress to add or delete even one acre of property from a national park, wilderness area, wild and scenic river or unit of the Coastal Barrier Resources System. There is nothing inherently unique about the establishment of a national wildlife refuge unit that should prevent Congress from approving a refuge which will end up costing millions of dollars. While I suspect the Fish and Wildlife Service will be unwilling to give up this unilateral authority, I would remind my colleagues that the Service intends to establish two refuges in Florida and Kansas that will cost more than a billion dollars. If we are going to put our taxpayers on the hook for this kind of massive expenditure, at a minimum, we should be willing to authorize those land acquisitions. This is the fundamental purpose of the National Wildlife Refuge Review Act.