

Committee on Resources

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STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE WAYNE T. GILCHREST, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON H. R. 1497: SIKES ACT REAUTHORIZATION ACT: APRIL 10, 2003.

Good morning. Today, the Subcommittee will hear testimony on H.R. 1497, a measure introduced by Chairman Richard Pombo to extend the authorization for Title I of the Sikes Act.

This law, which was first enacted in 1960, is responsible for the conservation of fish, wildlife and their habitat at some 25 million acres of military land. The Department of Defense has some 400 military installations throughout the United States that contain wildlife resources. In fact, nearly 300 federally listed threatened and endangered species reside on those lands under the jurisdiction of DOD. In many ways, these DOD lands are a unique ecosystem.

In 1997, this law was reauthorized and a number of significant changes were made to the underlying statute. The most significant modification was the requirement that the Department of Defense prepare a comprehensive integrated natural resource management plan for each of its installations that have plant and animal species. These plans would include an inventory of fish and wildlife resources, efforts to protect wetlands, how natural resource laws will be enforced, whether wildlife-oriented recreation will be permitted and how our vital fish and wildlife populations will be managed in the future.

In addition, the law now requires that the Department submit these plans for public review and that they be written in full consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the affected states. Finally, P.L. 105-85 stipulated that the Department must maintain "a significant number of professionally trained natural resource management personnel" to prepare and implement integrated natural resource management plans.

During the course of this hearing, I hope to learn from our witnesses how many integrated natural resource management plans have been implemented; whether the consultation process is working; if a sufficient number of professionally trained personnel have been retained as employees and not contractors for the Department of Defense as the law requires and whether the Disabled Sportsmen's Access Act has been a success.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses and I am pleased to recognize the ranking Democratic Member, the Honorable Frank Pallone.

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