

TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM HARTWIG, CHIEF OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM,
UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE
THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
RESOURCES, REGARDING H. R. 4947 Cahaba RIVER National Wildlife Refuge Expansion, H. R.
5232 Cherry Valley Refuge Study Act, AND H. R. 5094 Transfer of the Mattamuskeet Lodge to the
State of North Carolina.

May 10, 2006

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am William Hartwig, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service).

I appreciate this opportunity to provide the Administration's views on three bills before the Committee: H.R. 4947 Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Expansion; H.R. 5232 Cherry Valley Refuge Study Act; and H.R. 5094 Transfer of the Mattamuskeet Lodge to the State of North Carolina.

H.R. 4947 Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Expansion

H.R. 4947 authorizes expansion of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to include additional lands and waters in Bibb County, Alabama. The Administration appreciates that Representative Bachus and his constituents are interested in having the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) expand its role in the area around Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge. However, the Administration does not support this legislation at the present time.

By way of background, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) continues to expand partnerships with corporations, local communities, and other conservation groups to protect the Cahaba River and its unique natural resources. Though the Cahaba River has experienced a dramatic decline of freshwater fish and wildlife during the past 50 years, it is still one of the nation's most biologically diverse rivers. It currently supports 64 rare and imperiled plant and animal species, and 15 federally listed fish, snail, and mussel species – 13 of which are found nowhere else in the world. There are a total of 131 species of fish in this River – more than any other river of its size in North America.

To protect a critical core area along the Cahaba River, Congress passed the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act (Act), which became Public Law 106-331 on October 19, 2000. The Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to acquire up to 3,500 acres of lands and waters within a designated acquisition boundary. In partnership with TNC, the Service began acquiring land for the Cahaba River NWR in September 2002. To date, the Service has acquired a total of 3,414 acres at a cost of \$5,680,418. We are working with the remaining landowners within the approved boundary to acquire the remaining lands using current funding.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Pub. L. 105-57) requires the Service to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for each refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System). The CCP describes desired future conditions for a refuge and provides long-range guidance and management direction to achieve refuge purposes. It is during this process that expansion of a refuge is considered and recommended if increasing the size will help us meet the purpose for which the refuge was established. Development of a CCP provides a forum for meaningful public participation and close coordination with states, local communities, and other partners. It also affords local citizens an opportunity to help shape future management of a refuge, recognizing the important role of refuges in nearby communities.

A draft CCP will be developed for Cahaba Refuge in the future, during which the public will have the opportunity to express their views. We believe that expansion would be premature until the Service has completed its Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the refuge.

In addition to evaluating the future needs of a refuge, based on the goals and direction of that refuge, the Service must consider its current resources when deciding whether to expand existing refuge boundaries or establish a new refuge. We must fully consider available budgets, staffing levels, and strategic needs throughout the Refuge System. One of the Service's highest priorities for strategic management of the Refuge System generally includes purchasing in-holdings within currently approved refuge boundaries.

Establishing new refuges or significantly expanding existing ones can compromise the Service's ability to address existing refuge and Refuge System needs. There must be a balance between acquiring new lands and meeting the operational, maintenance and restoration requirements of the lands already in public ownership. Any additional operational

and maintenance costs associated with expanding a refuge's land base and lease management program must be fully evaluated and accounted for.

We have evaluated the proposed land expansion in H.R. 4947 for the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge. After a careful review of the Service's current priorities and available funding, we have concluded that the funding needs associated with the operational requirements to expand the refuge would compromise our ability to properly manage and address the needs of the refuge, as well as other refuges throughout the system.

Many other opportunities and tools exist for protecting the important resources of the Cahaba River system. Service programs such as Partners for Fish and Wildlife, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the Landowner Incentive Program, Private Stewardship Grants, and others can be used in cooperation with State, local and private partners to restore and protect natural resources. The State of Alabama also receives funds through the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration, Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration, state wildlife grants, and Section 6 endangered species grants. We will be pleased to work with our State and private partners to protect the important resources of the Cahaba River, possibly, through these other programs.

H.R. 5232 Cherry Valley Refuge Study Act

Before addressing the substance of the bill pending before you, I would like to offer some background on the region in Pennsylvania known as Cherry Valley.

Cherry Valley is a 30,000 acre area located at the southern end of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, south of Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. The area has a number of important or rare habitats, such as wetlands, bogs, fens, and caves. The valley is inhabited by what may be the largest population of the federally listed, threatened bog turtle within the species range. It is also an important area for Indiana bats, migrating raptors, and anadromous fish.

In December 2000, The Nature Conservancy began discussions with the Service regarding the importance of Cherry Valley to the bog turtle, threats to the valley's habitats, and possible protection mechanisms. In March 2004, the Friends of Cherry Valley, with the support of the local counties and municipalities, briefed Congressman Paul E. Kanjorski (D-11-PA) on the proposal to establish a national wildlife refuge in Cherry Valley. The Nature Conservancy and National Wildlife Federation have also supported this project.

The Service believes that future management and growth of the Refuge System must thoroughly consider the national ecological significance of all new refuge proposals, and ensure that there will be adequate financial resources to operate and maintain any new refuges. As stated earlier, the establishment of new refuges can compromise the Service's ability to address existing refuge and Refuge System needs, and will increase the Service's operational and maintenance costs over the long-term. Regarding strategic management of the Refuge System, the Service has made its first priority the acquisition of lands within approved boundaries at existing refuges. The Service also looks at expansions of existing refuges where there are immediate threats to the integrity of refuge resources. In many cases, the establishment of new refuges compromises the achievement of refuge goals at other refuges due to other priorities and tight budget allocations.

Therefore, the Administration does not support H.R. 5232. The Service has conducted a preliminary study on the establishment of a new refuge at Cherry Valley, and found that we cannot support a new refuge, given other higher priorities for land acquisition in the Northeast that support existing refuge needs.

However, there are a number of other mechanisms not involving Federal ownership that can also be used to protect the important resources of Cherry Valley, and the Service stands ready to assist the natural resources community and other interested stakeholders in the evaluation such alternatives. As stated above, the Service has a number of programs that can potentially assist with land conservation efforts at the state and local level.

H.R. 5094 Transfer of the Mattamuskeet Lodge to the State of North Carolina

H.R. 5094 authorizes the transfer of the Mattamuskeet Lodge, located at Mattamuskeet NWR, to the State of North Carolina. In addition to the Lodge, the transfer would include the transfer of 6.25 acres of the Refuge, as well as the current Refuge administrative office. The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission would be the managing agency. The Administration supports this legislation for the reasons outlined below.

The building known as "Mattamuskeet Lodge" was originally constructed as a pumping station in 1916 to drain Lake Mattamuskeet and create farmable land. After significant financial loss, pumping of the lake was abandoned. The pumping station and Lake Mattamuskeet were purchased by the Federal government in 1934 to create Mattamuskeet

National Wildlife Refuge. In 1937, the Civilian Conservation Corps completed a renovation project to turn the pumping station into a hunting and fishing lodge, which was named Mattamuskeet Lodge. In 1974, lodging and restaurant operations were ended and the building closed to public use due to inadequate finances to operate and maintain the facility.

In 1980, the Mattamuskeet Lodge was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Heightened concerns about the future of the Lodge resulted in citizens and state officials joining efforts in 1988 to obtain funding to rehabilitate the Lodge. These efforts resulted in the reopening of a portion of the building for public functions. Unfortunately, engineers discovered severe structural problems in 1999, which resulted in the Lodge, once again, being closed to all public use.

Current estimates for structural repairs necessary to make the 15,000 square foot building structurally sound are between \$3.5 million and \$5.5 million. Another \$6.5 million to \$8.5 million are necessary to fully restore the building for public use.

In 2005, North Carolina State Senator Marc Basnight requested that the Mattamuskeet Lodge be transferred to the State of North Carolina. Senator Basnight proposes to fully restore the Mattamuskeet Lodge. While local volunteers, East Carolina University, and two friends groups – Friends of Mattamuskeet Lodge and the Partnership for the Sounds – have assisted with repairs over the years, State funds cannot be used to restore buildings not under State ownership. H.R. 5094 would resolve this limitation by transferring ownership to the State.

Uses of a fully restored Lodge will not be finalized until full public input is obtained. However, current proposed uses include historic and environmental interpretation, an ecological field station, and hosting of public events. A Memorandum of Understanding is being developed between the Service and the State, which will ensure that the lodge is managed in close coordination with Mattamuskeet NWR.

H.R. 5094 would transfer the Mattamuskeet Lodge and 6.25 acres of land adjoining the facility to provide for parking and management of a fully restored Lodge. The current administrative office for Mattamuskeet NWR is also located on the tract and will need to be replaced at a different location on the Refuge. The administrative building was constructed in 1963 and is in need of renovation or replacement. The Service currently has funds to replace the administration building on another area of the refuge.

A fully restored Mattamuskeet Lodge would be an economic asset to a rural area that is striving to increase tourism to replace revenue lost from a declining commercial fishing and farming industry. Mattamuskeet NWR would also benefit by an integral relationship with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, an increase in graduate research projects, and increased outreach opportunities for children and families.

The Mattamuskeet Lodge is an important and readily recognized symbol of northeastern North Carolina. The public is extremely concerned about the future of this symbol and wants the facility restored as soon as possible. Indeed, this legislation removes a significant financial obligation for the Service. The Administration supports this legislation for the reasons outlined here.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.