

STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER L. ROBERTS
COUNCILMAN, JEFFERSON PARISH, STATE OF LOUISIANA

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS

CONCERNING H.R. 1515, TO ADJUST THE BOUNDARY OF THE BARATARIA PRESERVE UNIT OF THE JEAN LAFITTE NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK AND PRESERVE IN THE STATE OF LOUISIANA AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

June 9, 2005

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Jefferson Parish Council's views on H.R. 1515. This bill would adjust the boundary of the Barataria Preserve Unit of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve (Park) in Louisiana.

THE PROBLEM:

In 1978, the Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve was established to preserve for present and future generations significant examples of the rich natural and cultural resources of Louisiana's Mississippi Delta region. The park consists of six physically separate sites and a park headquarters located in New Orleans. One of these sites, the Barataria Preserve Unit, represents both the culture of those who settled the area sustained them. Located on the outskirts of New Orleans, Barataria serves as an interpretive experience of this greatest of coastal wetlands, the only part of Louisiana's coastal wetlands preserved in the National Park System.

As the result of the settlement by the U.S. Department of Justice of two lawsuits brought by landowners against federal agencies, more than 3,900 acres of land adjacent to the Barataria Preserve are already in federal ownership. However, these lands are not managed by the National Park Service and therefore presently unavailable for public use. An Act of Congress is necessary to allow inclusion of these lands into a new boundary for the Park.

THE SOLUTION:

To address this problem, this legislation would:

- adjust the boundary of the Barataria Preserve Unit of the Jean Lafitte Historical Park and Preserve by simply transferring more than 3,900 acres of wetlands to the Park and expanding the authorized acreage of the Preserve to accommodate this transfer;
- acquire federally owned lands that have already been paid for by the American people so there is no cost;
- protect private property rights as the landowners of the private property tracts included in the new boundary are free to sell their property or not under a willing seller only provision;
- enable us to preserve a crucial component of one of the largest and most productive expanses of coastal wetlands in North America; coastal Louisiana or as they are know: America's Wetlands;
- protect this crucial area so that Americans can experience, first hand, the amazing beauty and fertility of Louisiana's bountiful coastal wetlands, the most threatened wetland ecosystem in the country and
- offer people the opportunity to canoe, explore, fish, hunt and view the wildlife of this national treasure, all under the management and protection of the park service.

The Jefferson Parish Council and the Mayor and Councilmen of the Town of Jean Lafitte support H.R. 1515 submitted by Congressman Jindal.

Mr. Chairman, this completes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any question you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.