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Testimony  
Before the Committee on Resources  
United States House of Representatives\*

Hearing on "the Status of the Eastern Oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) and the Petition to List the Eastern Oyster as Endangered or Threatened under the Endangered Species Act"

July 19, 2005

Chairman Pombo and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify before you on the Status of the Eastern Oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) and the Petition to List it under the Endangered Species act.

I am Mike Voisin Chairman of the Louisiana Oyster Task Force a governmental agency within the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries composed of Oyster Industry Association and Governmental Agency appointees. The Louisiana Oyster Task Force was created by the 1988 Louisiana Legislature with the directive to strengthen the oyster industry. I am currently President of the Molluscan Shellfish Committee (a part of the National Fisheries Institute (NFI)) and a board member of the Gulf Oyster Industry Council (GOIC) and the Louisiana Oyster Dealers and Growers Association (LODGA).

I am a seventh (7 th) generation oyster farmer and processor. Our farm comprises approximately 14,000 acres of water bottoms in Coastal Louisiana which produces between 15 million to 25 million pounds of in-shell oysters annually. This represents 45 million to 75 million individual oysters that we harvest on an annual basis. Since our oysters take anywhere from 2 to 4 years to grow to harvest size, this means that at any one time our farm may have anywhere from 135 million to 225 million individual oysters on it.

The State of Louisiana produces approximately 250 million in shell pounds of oysters annually or 750 million individual oysters with a similar growth cycle of 2 to 4 years to market size, this means that at any one time there are approximately 2.25 billion oysters in our oyster farms and public producing areas. The Gulf States combined with Louisiana produce annually approximately 500 million in shell pounds of oysters, totaling approximately 1.5 billion individual oysters and maintaining approximately 4.5 billion individual oysters in Gulf producing areas at any one time.

So one might ask why anyone would consider Eastern Oysters for a listing on the Endangered Species Act. That is a question that I ask myself.

Even in areas along the Eastern United States seaboard where in some areas oyster diseases have had an impact on harvestable populations there are hundreds of millions of individual oysters in their coastal areas.

Could the answer to my question be that someone is trying to impact the livelihood of thousands for a personal political agenda by using the Endangered Species Act? If this is the case, which it appears to be, then maybe Congress needs to look at significant changes to this act!

The petition to list the Eastern Oyster as Endangered or Threatened

Under the Endangered Species act is targeted at concerns in the Chesapeake Bay. For a number of years Congress has funded oyster research in this area and some successes have occurred! Thomas Jefferson our third President said, "Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude." I believe that Congress has had the right mental attitude in funding this research and should continue to do so. I believe that the petitioner may have the wrong mental attitude relating to this concern.

We must continue to press forward on resolving whatever concerns are presented to the oyster community. As Babe Ruth said, "We must never let the fear of striking out get in your way."

Thomas J. Watson a successful businessman said, "Would you like me to give you a formula for success? It's quite simple, really. Double your rate of failure... You're thinking of failure as the enemy of success. But it isn't at all... You can be discouraged by failure—or you can learn from it. So go ahead and make mistakes. Make all you can. Because, remember that's where you'll find success." I believe that we are getting closer to narrowing in on significant success in the

Chesapeake's oyster challenge. But without a viable ability to market a product the incentive to invest in oyster reef and crop expansion will be lost. And if we lose a generation of harvesters, farmers and processors we may never see a recovery of the oyster or oyster communities in this area.

A few years ago my oldest son graduated from Brigham Young University and was trying to decide if he was going to become the eighth generation in our family to continue in the oyster community. I told him of the great potential and future that our family business had and how with good management and research and development we could grow and continue to be successful. He is now the eighth generation of our family in the oyster community, where his younger brother who just graduated from the University of Utah will be joining him this September. We must continue to do the necessary research and development (with it's associated failures and successes) with academia and the oyster community to once again help it thrive.

Raul Armesto said,"The world isn't interested in the storms you encountered, but whether or not you brought in the ship." This is one ship worth bringing in!

Let me once again speak of things that are happening in the Gulf of Mexico. The oyster community has supported at Louisiana State University the development of a small oyster hatchery in Grand Isle, Louisiana. My Father, Brother and Nephew are working on a project with the hatchery that they believe may double our company's oyster production in 3 to 5 years! That means we may harvest an additional 45 to 75 million individual oysters annually.

Henry Ford once said," You can do anything with if you have enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is the yeast that makes your hopes rise to the stars. With it, there is accomplishment. Without it, there are only alibis". We must foster the enthusiasm that exists to resolve the challenges that are before us!

We do not support the petitioners request to have Eastern Oysters listed under the Endangered Species Act as either threatened or endangered! We do support appropriate changes to the Endangered Species Act that will not allow successful and viable resources to be subjected to this type of review and continued funding for research and development in this area.