

**Opening Statement**  
**The Honorable Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan**  
**Ranking Member**  
**Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs**  
**Thursday, May 26, 2011**

**Oversight Hearing on “Buying More Land When We Can’t Maintain What We Already Own: The National Wildlife Refuge System’s Operations and Maintenance Backlog Story!”**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world’s finest network of protected lands and waters designed to conserve our fish and wildlife resources. Refuges are located in every state and in nearly every territory, including in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Millions of people visit refuges each year to hunt, fish, and observe wildlife; and the Refuge System generates \$1.7 billion in sales for local communities and creates nearly 27,000 jobs annually.

The Refuge System is under increasing strain from tight budgets and an operations and maintenance backlogs of \$3.4 billion. In my own district, the operating needs required to hire staff to manage, and to develop and implement visitor services, education, and volunteer programs at the Mariana Trench and

the Mariana Arc of Fire National Wildlife Refuges are expected to cost over \$380,000.

While these specific refuges are relatively new, the overall operations and maintenance backlog did not arise overnight. This backlog has been a growing problem from decades of chronic underfunding over many Administrations and Congresses, both Republican and Democrat. We must find ways to provide additional resources and support to the Refuge System to address this problem and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, who have been invited to share their creative ideas and solutions on how to address the Refuge System's operations and maintenance backlog.

It is imperative that we also make important legacy investments in our refuges *now* to ensure that these fish, wildlife, and habitats are protected for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is generated by offshore oil and gas drilling revenues and not taxpayers' dollars, provides the Fish and Wildlife Service

with resources it needs to acquire lands and conservation easements from *willing* sellers and land owners, which can result in operational efficiencies and connectivity within the Refuge System.

Whether for operations, maintenance, conservation easements, or land acquisition, every one dollar invested in our Refuge System by the federal government returns about four dollars to local communities. Supporting the Refuge System is a worthy investment to conserve fish and wildlife, to protect a critical part of America's natural heritage, and to support all of the communities, which we represent.

Again, I thank the witnesses for testifying today and look forward to learning more about this important issue.