

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Edward J. Markey
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. Our National Wildlife Refuge System represents the greatest network of protected lands dedicated to fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation on the planet. These Refuges provide world-class recreational opportunities to fish, hunt, and observe wildlife to forty-four million visitors a year and generate \$1.7 billion in sales annually for local communities.

Recent extreme weather events, including tornadoes in the Midwest, flooding in the Northeast and along the Mississippi, and

wildfires in the Southwest and Texas, have had severe consequences on lives, livelihoods, and local economies throughout our country. For the Refuge System, these extreme weather events can only mean increases to the operations and maintenance backlog, \$500 million of which has already been attributed to natural disasters. Clearly, we must continue to address this operations and maintenance backlog, and I thank the witnesses for presenting their ideas on what steps we can take in this respect.

At the same time, the Fish and Wildlife Service must continue to walk and chew gum at the same time. We must support the Service in addressing their backlog *and* investing in the

future of our Refuge System, through land acquisition and conservation easements from *willing* land owners. Land acquisition and conservation easements are important tools, which allow for more effective and efficient management practices. Using the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is composed of a small amount of revenue from offshore oil and gas drilling, the Service can acquire lands and waters to improve and better manage refuges. Given our continued subsidization of Big Oil, this seems but a small price to pay to mitigate for the impacts of drilling on the environment.