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PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN (CCP) FOR THE CHINCOTEAGUE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, OCEANS AND INSULAR AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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CONTENTS

	Page
Hearing held on Friday, February 17, 2012	1
Statement of Members:	
Fleming, Hon. John, a Representative in Congress from the State of Louisiana	1
Prepared statement of	2
Hanabusa, Hon. Colleen W., a Representative in Congress from the State of Hawaii	3
Prepared statement of	4
Statement of Witnesses:	
Chesson, S. Scott, Owner, Best Western Plus, Chincoteague Island, Virginia	24
Prepared statement of	26
Harris, Hon. Andy, a Representative in Congress from the State of Maryland, Oral statement of	5
Payne, Nancy, Owner, Clouds Gallery, Chincoteague Island, Virginia	20
Prepared statement of	22
Rigell, Hon. E. Scott, a Representative in Congress from the State of Virginia	6
Prepared statement of	8
Letter to Dan Ashe, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, submitted for the record	48
Tarr, Hon. Jack, Mayor, Town of Chincoteague, Virginia	14
Prepared statement of	16
Thornton, Hon. Wanda J., Member, Accomack County Board of Supervisors	17
Prepared statement of	19
Weber, Wendi, Regional Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior	9
Prepared statement of	11
Additional materials supplied:	
House Joint Resolution No. 226, 112th Congress	50
Lewis, Ted, President, Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce, Chincoteague Island, Virginia, Letter to The Honorable Jack Tarr, Mayor, Town of Chincoteague, submitted for the record	51
List of documents retained in the Committee's official files	52
Resolution of Accomack County Board of Supervisors approved February 15, 2012, submitted for the record	52
Resolution of Town of Chincoteague, Virginia, approved December 5, 2011, submitted for the record	53

OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN (CCP) FOR THE CHINCOTEAGUE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE.

Friday, February 17, 2012
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m., in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. John Fleming [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Fleming, Wittman, Harris; and Hanabusa.

Also Present: Representative Rigell.

Dr. FLEMING. The Subcommittee will come to order.

The Chairman notes the presence of a quorum.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. JOHN FLEMING, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF LOUISIANA

Dr. FLEMING. Good morning. Today the Subcommittee will conduct an oversight hearing on the proposed Comprehensive Conservation Plan, or CCP, for the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia. During the past year, we have heard repeatedly from the Fish and Wildlife Service that the reason they recommend no funding for the refuge revenue-sharing program is because refuges are economic engines for the local economies.

In this particular case, there is no question that the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and the 1.4 million people who visit it each year are critical to the economic vitality to the Town of Chincoteague. Each summer, families travel to Chincoteague to enjoy its beautiful beaches and to gaze upon some 125 descendants of Spanish mustangs which have lived on the island for some 400 years.

These are ponies that were memorialized in Marguerite Henry's 1947 book, "Misty of Chincoteague." It is therefore not surprising that the congressman who represents this community, the Town Council of Chincoteague, the local Chamber of Commerce, and I am told the overwhelming majority of the residents were aghast to learn that the Fish and Wildlife Service is considering management alternatives, which they believe will have a devastating economic impact on their town.

Among the proposals being considered is closing the existing recreational beach, building new parking facilities, and establishing a shuttle service from a remote location miles from the existing beach, and reducing the size of the pony herd.

From my perspective, what is most disturbing is that despite the fact that the CCP will not be completed until at least 2013, the Service has already started to implement their changes. They have telegraphed their intentions by seeking up to $7 million in Federal grants from the Paul Sarbanes Transit in the Parks Program, by indicating their desire to reduce the size of the pony herd, and by signing a contract to purchase the Maddox family campground.

The fact that the Fish and Wildlife Service is moving forward with one option while at the same time telling the public that they are reviewing all options is certainly at least contrary to the spirit of the National Environmental Policy Act.

This process lacks transparency and indicates an unwillingness to work with either small businesses or the local Chincoteague community, and begs the question as to when this Administration will stop placing the welfare of its bureaucracy over the welfare of the citizens.

At a minimum, the public must be given an opportunity to comment on the proposed draft environmental impact statement before and not after the agency implements its preference. To do otherwise is simply unacceptable and will prompt further congressional inquiries.

I look forward to hearing from each of our witnesses. I want to now recognize the Ranking Minority Member of the Subcommittee, the gentlelady from the Commonwealth—I am sorry——

Ms. HANABUSA. We are a state.

Dr. FLEMING [continuing]. From Hawaii. We were expecting Mr. Sablan, who is from the CNMI, and so I am having to go off script here because Ms. Hanabusa from Hawaii, which is, by the way, a state, if anyone hasn't heard——

[Laughter.]

Dr. FLEMING [continuing]. Will be sitting in his place.

So with that, I will yield to the gentlelady from Hawaii.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Fleming follows:]

Statement of The Honorable John Fleming, Chairman, Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs

Good morning. Today, the Subcommittee will conduct an oversight hearing on the proposed Comprehensive Conservation Plan or CCP for the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia.

During the past year, we have heard repeatedly from the Fish and Wildlife Service that the reason they recommend no funding for the Refuge Revenue Sharing Program is because refuges are economic engines for their local communities.

In this particular case, there is no question that the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and the 1.4 million people who visit it each year are critical to the economic vitality of the Town of Chincoteague. Each summer, families travel to Chincoteague to enjoy its beautiful beaches and to gaze upon some 125 descendants of Spanish mustangs which have lived on the Island for some 400 years. These are ponies that were memorialized in Marguerite Henry's 1947 book "Misty of Chincoteague".

It is, therefore, not surprising that the Congressman who represents this community, the Town Council of Chincoteague, the local Chamber of Commerce and I am told the overwhelming majority of residents, were aghast to learn that the Fish and Wildlife Service is considering management alternatives which they believe will have a devastating economic impact on their town.

Among the proposals being considered is closing the existing recreational beach, building new parking facilities and establishing a shuttle service from a remote location miles from the existing beach, and reducing the size of the pony herd.

From my perspective, what is most disturbing, is that despite the fact that the CCP will not be completed until at least 2013, the Service has already started to

implement their changes. They have telegraphed their intentions by seeking up to $7 million in federal grants from the Paul Sarbanes Transit in the Parks Program, by indicating their desire to reduce the size of the pony herd, and by signing a contract to purchase the Maddox Family Campground.

The fact that the Fish and Wildlife Service is moving forward with one option, while at the same time telling the public that they are reviewing all options, is certainly contrary to at least the spirit of the National Environmental Policy Act. This process lacks transparency and indicates an unwillingness to work with either small businesses or the local Chincoteague community and begs the question as to when this administration will stop placing the welfare of its bureaucracy over the welfare of the citizenry. At a minimum the public must be given an opportunity to comment on the proposed Draft Environment Impact Statement before and not after the agency implements its preference. To do otherwise, is simply unacceptable and will prompt further Congressional inquiries.

I look forward to hearing from each of our witnesses and want to now recognize the Ranking Minority Member of the Subcommittee, the gentleman from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Congressman Sablan.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. COLLEEN HANABUSA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF HAWAII

Ms. HANABUSA. Thank you, Chairman Fleming. Some people actually believe we are probably the best state, especially us.

As mandated by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge of Assateague Island is managed for the protection and conservation of wildlife. This includes the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel and threatened species including the Atlantic Coast piping plover, the Atlantic loggerhead turtle, and the plant the seabeach amaranth.

The pristine beauty of this natural barrier island is unparalleled, making it one of the Nation's most visited refuges, with 1.4 million visitors a year. People travel to Chincoteague for its recreational beach, the wild horse population, and it is a major stopover for migratory birds. During the summer tourist season, the refuge brings in about $42 million to the Town itself.

The refuge is currently drafting a new Comprehensive Conservation Plan, or as the Chairman said, the CCP, to replace the existing planning document, the 1992 Master Plan. Fish and Wildlife Service has completed initial scoping of stakeholder concerns and has developed three management alternatives.

Of great concern today is one aspect common to all management alternatives, the addition of a satellite parking lot with shuttle bus to supplement the amount of parking available at the recreational beach.

Assateague is a barrier island shaped by dynamic coastal processes, causing natural beach erosion during storms. Storms regularly alter recreational beach and destroy the parking lot used by the visitors. Since 1938, Chincoteague has experienced over a foot of sea level rise, and the parking lot is increasingly vulnerable to increasing storm frequency and intensity.

Recognizing these vulnerabilities, the 1992 Master Plan included provisions to supplement the beach parking with a satellite location on Chincoteague Island and shuttle transit to transport visitors to the beach. Restoring and maintaining this beach parking in the current location is expensive and risky.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has been able to rebuild the lot with the help of Federal funding from the Department of Transportation's Emergency Funding Relief for Federally Owned Roads Pro-

gram. They estimate that they have spent nearly $2.4 million repairing parking lots on this site in the past four years alone. Destruction as a result of Hurricane Irene this last summer cost $862,000, and the beach was closed to cars for the last week of the summer tourist season.

There is concern that the refuge won't qualify for emergency funding year after year. The Service, working under the authority of the 1992 Master Plan, applied for and was awarded a $1.5 million grant to purchase from willing sellers for the satellite parking lot. This lot would only supplement the beach parking outlined in all CCP options.

This Committee has oversight of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and during these financially austere times, it seems to me to be responsible governing to stop pouring taxpayer dollars into a parking lot that will wash away with more frequency, and instead invest in a long-term solution.

Refuges generate $150 in local economic activity for every dollar it costs to run a refuge. Having expanded parking capacity will only increase the value of the refuge to the local economy.

I want to thank the witnesses, and look forward to hearing from them. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Hanabusa follows:]

Statement of The Honorable Colleen Hanabusa, Acting Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs

Thank you, Chairman Fleming.

As mandated by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on Assateague Island is managed for the protection and conservation of wildlife. This includes the endangered Delmarva fox squirrel, and threatened species including the Atlantic Coast piping plover, Atlantic loggerhead turtle, and the plant, seabeach amaranth. The pristine beauty of this natural barrier island is unparalleled making it one of the nation's most visited refuges with 1.4 million visits a year. People travel to Chincoteague for its recreational beach, the wild horse population and as a major stop-over for migratory birds. During the summer tourist season, the refuge brings in $42 million dollars to the Town of Chincoteague.

The refuge is currently drafting a new Comprehensive Conservation Plan to replace the current planning document, the 1992 Master Plan. The Fish and Wildlife Service has completed initial scoping of stakeholder concerns and has developed 3 management alternatives. Of great concern today is one aspect common to all management alternatives: the addition of a satellite parking lot with shuttle bus to supplement the amount of parking available at the recreational beach.

Assateague is a barrier island shaped by dynamic coastal processes causing natural beach erosion during storms. Storms regularly alter the recreational beach and destroy the parking lot used by visitors. Since 1938, Chincoteague has experienced over a foot of sea level rise and the parking lot is increasingly vulnerable to increasing storm frequency and intensity. Recognizing these vulnerabilities, the 1992 Master Plan included provisions to supplement the beach parking with a satellite location on Chincoteague Island and shuttle transit to transport visitors to the beach.

Restoring and maintaining this beach parking in the current location is expensive and risky. The Fish and Wildlife Service has been able to rebuild the lot with the help of federal funding from the Department of Transportation's Emergency Funding Relief for Federally Owned Roads program. They estimate that they have spent nearly 2.4 million dollars repairing parking lots on this site in the past 4 years. Destruction as a result of Hurricane Irene alone this last summer cost $862,000 and the beach was closed to cars for the last week of the summer tourist season. There is concern that the refuge won't qualify for emergency funding year after year.

The Service, working under the authority of the 1992 Master Plan, applied for and was awarded a $1.5 million dollar grant to purchase land from willing sellers for the satellite parking lot. This lot would only supplement the beach parking outlined in all CCP options. This Committee has oversight over the Fish and Wildlife Service and during these financially austere times, it seems to me to be responsible

governing to stop pouring tax payer dollars into a parking lot that will wash away with more frequency and instead invest in a long term solution. Refuges generate $150 in local economic activity for every $1 it costs to run refuges. Having expanded parking capacity will only increase the value of the refuge to the local economy.

I thank the witnesses and look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

Dr. FLEMING. I thank the gentlelady. I will make an editorial comment. I heard that figure $800,000. We actually looked into that, and what we came up with on Nor'easter Ida was $34,038.75, and for Hurricane Irene, $69,033.80.

So it looks like a tremendous difference from what we actually find from the records and what has been reported. So maybe that is something that our witnesses will be able to resolve for us.

Before I go forward, I want to mention that we will probably get called for votes at 10:00. And what we are going to try to do is try to get everyone's testimony in, and certainly comments from other Members this morning, try to squeeze that in before we leave for that vote. Then we will come right back—I think it is only one vote—and then we will go into the question-and-answer period.

So that is the plan, but as you know, things don't go according to plan often around here. But at least we have a plan.

Based on the traditions of this Subcommittee, I would now like to recognize the distinguished gentleman from the 1st District of Maryland, Congressman Andy Harris, a fellow physician, who represents the Maryland side of the refuge, for any opening statement he would like to make.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. ANDY HARRIS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MARYLAND

Dr. HARRIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding the hearing. Of course, Maryland's 1st Congressional District does border on the north side, and we of course have Assateague, the companion park to Chincoteague.

Mr. Chairman, you know, we are having the same problem in Assateague as well—a plan that seeks to remove the parking that is available near the beach. I mean, it is clear that the goal of the Federal Government that controls these tourist areas is, in the long term, to make sure that no one can park near where they are going to enjoy the beach.

That is a real shame because it is a driver for millions and millions of dollars of tourism revenue, as I think we are going to hear from the panel today. There are 1.5 million visitors, is the testimony, to Chincoteague. And, you know, let's say the figures are right and it costs between $200,000 and $700,000 to replace a parking lot after a major event. That would be less than 50 cents per visitor.

So I don't understand this. You are going to spend $7.5 million acquiring a piece of property. You are going to have to create a shuttle system. You are going to have to inconvenience users to use a shuttle system. It begs the obvious question: Why don't you just give the visitors the choice? Maybe we ought to poll the visitors, ask them, would you rather pay 50 cents more and park near the beach or be inconvenienced by having your family take a shuttle—develop a shuttle system, spend $7-1/2 million to buy a piece of property?

And then on top of that, what is also of concern to me is the plans that have been proposed that would require thinning the horse herd if you go to that plan. And some of the plans, Mr. Chairman, honestly, to thin the horse herd involve just euthanizing the horses.

As the testimony, I think, we will have is, these horses have been around for centuries. And now—because, again, the Federal Government is going to decide how people are going to enjoy the beach, they are also going to decide how these horses are going to live into the future.

Mr. Chairman, it seems like, again, there is this overwhelming desire to pretend that we are going to return the United States to the condition it was 300 years ago. Those just aren't the facts. People want to go to the beach. People from my district want to drive a little south, I am disappointed to say sometimes. They want to go into Virginia and they want to enjoy the beach down there.

And what they are going to have to do now is it is going to make it much more difficult for American citizens, taxpaying citizens, to enjoy the lands that are owned and operated by the U.S. Government. It is exactly the reverse of what—these lands are for the enjoyment of Americans, not for some plan that says, we are going to restore it to its native state.

We are going to pretend that people don't want to visit there. And worse than that, Mr. Chairman, when we should be encouraging industry, encouraging tourism, encouraging economic activity, it is pretty clear that the plans being proposed both to the south in Chincoteague as well as some of the plans to the north in Assateague would in fact do the opposite.

So Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you very, very much for holding this hearing. As you know we have discussed, I have another hearing I will have to attend. But I look forward to reviewing the record. And again, I thank you for holding a hearing on this very important subject.

Dr. FLEMING. The gentleman yields back, and I thank the gentleman for his comments.

I now ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from Virginia, Congressman Scott Rigell, who requested this oversight hearing, be allowed to sit with the Subcommittee and fully participate in our deliberations.

[No response.]

Dr. FLEMING. Hearing no objection, so ordered. Congressman, at the appropriate time, I will recognize you to introduce the Mayor and Supervisor for the Town of Chincoteague.

Thank you—I am sorry. We now need to give you an opportunity if you would like to make comments.

Ms. HANABUSA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And would this also be the right time to introduce and welcome our guests?

Dr. FLEMING. It is up to you.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. SCOTT RIGELL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF VIRGINIA

Mr. RIGELL. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much. And I am just delighted that my friend and colleague, Dr. Harris, has such first-

hand knowledge of this matter, and that my neighbor is right here standing with us in this.

And I appreciate you holding this important hearing today, and for graciously inviting me to be able to be here. It really is an honor and privilege to represent and serve the 2nd District of Virginia, which includes the beautiful and vibrant Town of Chincoteague.

This is a good time to welcome and introduce our guests here this morning.

Supervisor Wanda Thornton has called Chincoteague home since 1963. She joined the Chincoteague Town Council in 1990, and was elected to the Board of Supervisors there in 1996. And she is a small business owner, which I appreciate. She is the owner and operator of Pine Grove Campground there in Chincoteague.

And the good Mayor Jack Tarr is here. He has been the Mayor of Chincoteague since 1999, and previously served five terms on the Town Council. He was born and raised on Chincoteague, and in addition to serving as Mayor, he too is a local small business owner, has a local contracting business.

And Mr. Chesson—good morning, sir. Welcome to you. He is also another business owner, been a resident of the Town since—let's see, 23 years, and he owns and manages the Best Western Plus there in Chincoteague, directly related, of course, and benefitting from the tourism that comes in. And I think your firsthand knowledge of the sense of the business community there will be particularly enlightening to us this morning.

I also want to welcome Ms. Payne. Although I don't have your bio, you are a wonderful part of our community, and I appreciate you being here very much.

You know, I respect the valuable service provided by the National Wildlife Refuge system, and it is appropriate that we set aside our land, some of our land, not only for our benefit but for the benefit of our children and our grandchildren.

I had the great privilege of growing up hunting on the Merritt Island National Refuge; my dad worked out at the Cape, and so many mornings I have good memories of that, duck hunting with him there. And so I fully appreciate why we have the National Fish and Wildlife Service and the value that it brings to all Americans.

Now, that said, though, the direction that we are headed here, it is so clear to me that this is not a wise policy. This train has essentially pulled out of the station. And I have spent quite a bit of time with Lou Hinds and walked through this on the beach. And it is, in my view, a foregone conclusion, and that is one of the principal objections that I have to this plan. It is like it has been predetermined, and the train has already pulled out on where it is going.

I object to it on really four principal reasons:

Jobs, the adverse impact it will have on jobs, that is indisputable, in my view;

The cost—we are buying something we do not need with money we do not have; this is part of what is contributing to our fiscal crisis in America;

It is a flawed process. I believe it violates the NEPA process. That is a strong statement to make, but I believe the evidence reflects that;

And finally, and I would say most importantly, I believe it thwarts, disregards, the wisdom and the will of the local people. It is a classic example of an overreaching, paternalistic Federal Government who, for whatever motivation, believes it understands and knows what is best for the folks who have been there generation after generation.

So I oppose it. I have made this very clear. And I know we are reflecting the wisdom and the will of the local community; that has been made clear to me by the Mayor, the Supervisors there, businessmen and women I have spoken with, and also the Virginia House of Delegates. Lynwood Lewis, one of our delegates, who represents that wonderful part of the Commonwealth, made it clear in his letter to me that he supports what I am doing and he hopes that we are successful.

So I do look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses today. I thank you all for being here. And Mr. Chairman, thank you again. And Director Weber, thank you for being here. I look forward to hearing from you.

I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rigell follows:]

Statement of The Honorable Scott Rigell, Member of Congress, Virginia's 2nd Congressional District

Chairman Fleming, members of the committee, thank you for holding this important oversight hearing today and for graciously inviting me to participate. It is an honor and privilege to represent the 2nd District of Virginia which includes the historic town of Chincoteague.

I would like to begin by welcoming and introducing our guests from Chincoteague.

Supervisor Wanda Thornton has called Chincoteague home since 1963. She joined the Chincoteague Town Council in 1990 and was elected to the Accomack County Board of Supervisors in 1996. She is the owner and operator of Pine Grove Campground in Chincoteague.

Mayor Jack Tarr has been Mayor of the Town of Chincoteague since 1999 and previously served five years on the Town Council. Mayor Tarr was born and raised on Chincoteague. In addition to serving as Mayor, he owns and operates a local contracting business.

Mr. Scott Chesson has been a business owner in Chincoteague for 23 years. He owns and manages the Best Western Plus in Chincoteague. His knowledge of the sense of the local business community will be particularly relevant to the subject at hand today.

I respect the valuable service provided by the National Wildlife Refuge system. By setting aside lands for wildlife and providing public access and education, we preserve America's outdoor heritage for our own benefit and for that of future generations.

The Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge is one of the most visited sites in the refuge system. Visitors come from across the country to see the wild ponies and enjoy the beach on Assateague Island.

The town of Chincoteague has a unique relationship with the Refuge. For more than a generation, the town's economy has become dependent on beach driven tourism. The beach hosts more than 5,000 people on peak days. Any change to the refuge management plan which diminishes beach access will have a detrimental effect on the local economy.

I am very disappointed and troubled by the Fish and Wildlife Service's approach to the conservation planning process for Chincoteague for four principle reasons.

1. Jobs
2. Cost
3. The Flawed Process

I have been assured numerous times that the Refuge's intention is not to replace the beach parking but to supplement it and provide emergency backup parking for those occasional times when the parking lot sustains storm damage.

However, it is clear to me that the Refuge is pursuing an agenda to replace, rather than supplement the parking lot. In their application for a $3 million dollar grant to purchase an off-site parking location, refuge officials specifically described the purpose of the funding to "develop a park-and-ride facility to keep vehicles away from the vulnerable beachfront."

4. Complete disregard for the wisdom and will of the local people.

The town, the county, and the Virginia House of Delegates have all adopted resolutions disapproving of any effort to expand the boundaries of the Refuge within the town to establish a transit system. It flies in the face of common sense that the Refuge would continue to pursue a plan that has drawn such deep objections.

Moving this project forward ahead of the CCP undermines the integrity of the public process. The refuge is sending a clear signal that the public process is nothing more than a pro forma exercise with a foregone conclusion.

This is a classic example of an over reaching paternalistic federal government imposing its will without regard for the needs, desires, or economic well being of the people.

It is incumbent on us to ensure that the Fish and Wildlife service take no action to undermine the local economy or the people it serves.

Thank you, I yield back the balance of my time.

Dr. FLEMING. The gentleman yields back.

Now we get to the fun part. We will now hear from our witnesses. Like all witnesses, your written testimony will appear in full in the hearing record, so I ask that you keep your oral statements to five minutes—and we want to be as strict as possible because, as I said, we are trying to squeeze in the witness portion of this before we have to go for our first series of votes—which is as outlined in the letter that we sent to you under Committee Rule 4(a).

Our microphones are not automatic, so please press the button. As you see, you have five minutes to speak. It will be on the green light for the first four minutes; then it will turn yellow. When it turns red, please wrap up immediately, and that way we can make sure that we can get on with the meeting and get completed at a proper time.

I would now like to welcome today's witnesses. We have already had some introductions. We have Ms. Wendi Weber, who is the Northeast Regional Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; The Honorable Jack Tarr, Mayor of the Town of Chincoteague; The Honorable Wanda Thornton, Member, the Accomack County Board of Supervisors; Ms. Nancy Payne, owner of the Clouds Gallery; and Scott Chesson, who will speak on behalf of the business community in Chincoteague.

Ms. Weber, you are now recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF MS. WENDI WEBER, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ms. WEBER. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Fleming and Congressman Rigell and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Wendi Weber, the Northeast Regional Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and the development of the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan, or the CCP.

My written statement provides details on the public process and the range of potential management alternatives. In the interest of time, my remarks today will focus on the issue of offsite parking.

We are proud of Chincoteague Refuge and the value it provides to the local community. The Refuge was established in 1943 for the protection and management of migratory birds, particularly migrating and wintering waterfowl. With its undeveloped barrier beaches, wetlands, and maritime forest, Chincoteague Refuge supports a diversity of wildlife, including endangered species such as loggerhead turtles.

Chincoteague is one of the country's most visited Refuges, with nearly 1-1/2 million visits each year. This influx of people is enormously important to the local economy. Through a memorandum of understanding, the National Park Service manages public uses along a one-mile portion of the barrier beach at Toms Cove. The Park Service maintains a visitor station, parking lots, and a swimming beach.

Like all coastal barrier islands, the sands at Chincoteague are unstable and are shaped by ocean tides and storms. The current recreational beach is located in one of the most dynamic parts of the island. It is under constant threat of damage from flooding and erosion. Natural forces have eliminated the manmade dune system, and have repeatedly ravaged beach parking lots.

On the screen are photographs that show the challenges we face. The parking lots shown in the first photo, from 1994, were repeatedly overwhelmed by strong storms in the 1990s. Eventually, these lots had to be relocated.

The next photo, from 2011, shows the location of the current shoreline. As you can see, the parking areas from the 1990s are now under water. This photo also shows the location of the parking lots today. The current lots also have been repeatedly destroyed and repaired. In the photo, you can see that they have been recently overwashed by storm surge.

Continuing to repair these parking lots raises important questions. Is this a responsible use of taxpayer dollars? Is there a better way to provide recreational beach opportunities to the public that is fiscally sound and provides longer-term viability? These are key questions that the Service has posed to the public and will address in the CCP. The CCP will describe desired future conditions of the Refuge and provide long-range guidance and management direction.

There is no proposed CCP yet, but in August of 2011 we shared four potential alternatives with the public that could become part of the draft CCP. In December we eliminated one alternative in response to community input.

There are common elements to the three potential alternatives. Each includes a recreational beach with adjacent beach parking. Each includes supplemental offsite parking for busy days or for emergency backup when storm events wash out the beach parking. And each includes an alternative transportation system to service the offsite parking.

We expect to release a draft CCP to the public for comment this year. Offsite parking is an insurance policy for Refuge visitors. On busy summer days, the current lots fill up quickly. Offsite parking

would provide a welcomed option for people who don't want to wait to park or would rather take a shuttle and get on the beach, and if the beach parking lot is destroyed by storm surge, as happened before Labor Day last year, offsite parking will enable the beaches to stay open to visitors while repairs are made. We are pursuing supplemental parking to help ensure beach access, which is so critical to the local economy.

The Service has long sought to acquire land suitable for offsite parking. Suitable land only recently became available. Coincidental to the CCP process, the Service applied for a grant to help purchase the land, and continues to pursue other funding sources to complete the purchase.

In our continued discussions with the community, I believe it will become more apparent that the Service and the local community share the same values, and that we must work together closely to ensure the Refuge maintains its ability to conserve wildlife and provide outstanding recreational opportunities in the face of sea level rise and chronic storm damage.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to address any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Weber follows:]

Statement of Wendi Weber, Northeast Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior

Good morning Chairman Fleming and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Wendi Weber, Northeast Regional Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Thank you for the opportunity to testify about one of the most popular units of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) – Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, located on Assateague Island on the coast of Virginia.

My statement below describes the Service's developing comprehensive conservation plan for the refuge, and how we are approaching future management given the effects of environmental change to this very dynamic barrier island ecosystem. Our goal is to manage the refuge in a way that ensures: (1) its conservation purpose is achieved and maintained over the long term; (2) the public continues to have reasonable, appropriate, and compatible access; and (3) we make responsible decisions about how we utilize taxpayer dollars. In making our management decisions we also recognize the important role of the refuge for local communities.

Background

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1943 for the protection and management of migratory birds, especially migrating and wintering waterfowl. Wildlife abounds at Chincoteague. Its barrier beaches, wetlands, and maritime forests provide habitat for more than 320 different species. The refuge is considered a birding hot spot by the Audubon Society and has been designated a globally important bird area by the American Bird Conservancy. The refuge supports Delmarva fox squirrel, piping plover, Atlantic loggerhead sea turtles, and seabeach amaranth, all of which are protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Chincoteague is one of the most visited national wildlife refuges in the nation. It draws as many as 1.4 million visitors each year, and this influx of people is enormously important to the local tourism economy. The refuge sits adjacent to Assateague Island National Seashore, managed by the National Parks Service (NPS). To help accommodate visitors to the refuge, the NPS, through a Memorandum of Understanding, manages public use along a one mile portion of the barrier beach at Tom's Cove. The NPS maintains a visitor contact station, restrooms, bathhouses, showers, pedestrian trails, and a lifeguard-protected swimming beach.

Assateague Island, like all coastal barrier islands, is composed of unstable sediments that are vulnerable to storm damage and chronic erosion from wind and waves. Assateague Island is located at the interface of land and sea and serves as a first line of defense against the strong winds, huge waves, and powerful storm surges that accompany nor'easters and hurricanes. The exposure to wind, wave, and tidal energy keeps this coastal barrier in a state of constant flux, losing sand in some places and gaining it in others. The current recreational beach and facilities

of the refuge are located in one of the most dynamic areas of the island, which places them under constant threat of damage from flooding and erosion. The effects from environmental change on national wildlife refuges are not isolated to Chincoteague. The effects are being realized all along the Atlantic Coastline, including, for example, at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, and Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge.

Over the years, storms and their accompanying extreme high tides have repeatedly washed out the recreational beach parking lots at the refuge. The Service and NPS have relocated the beach parking lots further to the west as they have been washed out. For example, the parking lots shown in the attached photo from 1990 (Exhibit A) were repeatedly overwhelmed by strong storms throughout the 1990s. They have since been relocated. Exhibit B shows the location of the current shoreline in relation to the parking lots from the 1990s. As you can see, those parking areas are now completely underwater.

In the early 1990s, the Service developed a Master Plan for the refuge that is comparable to the comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) being developed today. At that time, as today, the beach parking lots were a major issue and the Service foresaw the eventual total loss of the land base where these parking lots are presently located. Anticipated and predicted loss of beach parking was addressed in the Master Plan as follows:

> [The Service will] continue private vehicle beach access as long as beach parking areas remain, and allow the National Park Service to maintain the existing number of parking spaces (961) as long as the land base directly behind the dunes remains, realizing that this area will eventually be lost due to the natural movement of the barrier island. As natural forces reduce the land base capable of supporting the current parking, the number of spaces will be reduced accordingly. As spaces are lost, an alternative means of transportation such as a shuttle system will need to be used in order to maintain beach use.

During the 20 years since the Master Plan was finalized, annual storm events and wave action impacted the man-made dune system between the parking lots and ocean. In the mid 1990s the NPS removed the dune system, which was restricting the growth of the beach and causing the swimming beach to become narrower. A rising ocean and coastal storms have contributed to the loss of parking lot areas and beach. The parking lots built as replacements have been repeatedly destroyed and the government has expended considerable funding to rebuild parking lots only to see them damaged again.

In 2009, the parking lots were totally destroyed by a November nor'easter and the area repeatedly over-washed that winter, preventing the NPS from rebuilding the parking lots until the spring. In 2011, Hurricane Irene totally destroyed the parking lots again, and they will be rebuilt again this spring. Repairing these parking lots costs taxpayers between $200,000 and $700,000 per event.

Continuing to invest in rebuilding parking lots in the same location only to watch them be destroyed and washed away raises a number of important questions, including: Is this good public policy and a responsible use of federal funds? Are these investments sustainable? Is there a better way to provide recreational beach opportunities to the public that is both fiscally-sound and provides longer-term viability? These are key questions that the Service has posed to the public and hopes to address through the current comprehensive conservation planning process for the refuge. We are confident that we can provide visitors with recreational beach access and provide sound public policy in the use of appropriated operational funding. It is our duty as public servants to be fiscally responsible in the management of these important conservation and wildlife areas.

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, requires the Service to develop a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) for each unit of the Refuge System by October 9, 2012. Each CCP is intended to describe desired future conditions of a refuge; provide long-range guidance and management direction to achieve the conservation purposes of the refuge, refuge policy requirements, and the mission of the Refuge System; and support compatible wildlife-dependent public uses on the refuge.

Beach parking and public access, and how they are affected by sea level rise and erosion, are some of the most important management issues being addressed in the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge CCP. In addition, the CCP is being devel-

oped through an open and transparent public process that provides extensive opportunity for input from the local community and the American public.

In 2010, the Service began a scoping process to gather public input and identify key issues and concerns to consider at the refuge as part of the CCP process. Since then, the Service has held nine public meetings or open houses. We also held four workshops with our state and municipal government agency partners, as well as other federal agencies. These included: April 2011, when we jointly developed CCP vision and goals; June 2011, when we jointly developed alternatives; and, December 2011, when we met to refine alternatives and resolve outstanding issues. Three planning update newsletters that requested public input and comments were published on the refuge's website. Refuge staff have given dozens of presentations to community groups, hosted tours, and given interviews to keep the public informed and to solicit public input throughout the CCP process. The opportunities for public input to help shape the refuge's CCP have been numerous, and we are committed to maintaining an open and transparent process as we move forward.

At the current stage in the process, we have not yet finalized a draft CCP, nor identified a preferred alternative. However, in August 2011, we released four potential alternatives for public consideration. These alternatives present different management scenarios that could be implemented to meet the purposes of the refuge. While it is unusual for the Service to seek public comment prior to development of a preferred alternative and draft CCP, we decided to do so because we anticipated an unusually high level of interest from the public.

In December 2011, the Service met with representatives from the town of Chincoteague, Accomack County, the National Park Service, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA's Wallops Flight Facility is located nearby at Wallops Island), the State of Virginia, the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission, and Volpe Transportation Center to review the comments received to date regarding the initial draft alternatives. As a group we revised the alternatives. We are now considering three alternatives, which are outlined in more detail in an addendum to this statement. Common parts of all three draft alternatives are: a recreational beach, parking adjacent to the beach, off-site parking to supplement adjacent beach parking and to serve as emergency back-up parking, and an alternative transportation system.

These three alternatives will be included in the forthcoming draft CCP and environmental impact statement, which the Service plans to release for public review and comment this year. The final CCP should be complete in the summer of 2013.

Offsite Parking and Alternative Transportation

Throughout the ongoing CCP process, and consistent with the direction given in the refuge's original Master Plan, the Service has pursued the acquisition of offsite parking at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. Offsite parking will ensure continued access to the refuge for the visiting public in case of short-term parking lot washout events, as well as potentially long-term flooding from sea level rise and inundation.

Regardless of the alternative selected in the CCP process, the Service believes it is prudent to provide offsite parking at the refuge in case the current beach parking is completely destroyed by an intense storm. This scenario was realized just before the busy 2011 Labor Day holiday, when Hurricane Irene swept up the coast of Virginia the week before one of the busiest tourist days of the year. While Service and NPS staff worked tirelessly to restore as much parking as possible, only one-third (350 spaces) of the parking could be restored in time for the holiday. Thankfully, a local non-profit group scrambled to create a shuttle system for visitors. Providing parking for these emergency situations is a priority for the Refuge.

To address the long-term sustainability of parking as well as emergency needs, in the 1990s the Service attempted to negotiate the purchase of 200 acres of land owned by the Maddox family in the town of Chincoteague near the refuge's entrance. While that effort was unsuccessful, the refuge has maintained its interest in purchasing this land since that time.

In 2008 and 2009, the Service, with the Assateague Island National Seashore, the town of Chincoteague, and Accomack County, worked with the U.S. Department of Transportation's Volpe Center on an alternative transportation study at the refuge. The study objectively analyzed different ways to address transportation-related problems, including beach access, traffic, and parking. Key planning documents for the town of Chincoteague and Accomack County specify similar transportation planning objectives, such as reducing traffic congestion, facilitating forming and operating alternative transportation, and improving emergency management and transportation safety.

Independent of, but coincidental to, the ongoing development of the refuge's CCP, in 2010 the Maddox family approached the Service to express their interest in selling the property. The Service recognized the need to move quickly to take advantage of the important opportunity. Based upon the analysis in the alternative transportation study, and the direction given in the refuge's 1992 Master Plan, the Service entered into an agreement to purchase the property in May 2011. Also in May 2011, the Service applied for a Federal Transportation Administration Sarbanes Transit in the Parks grant to help fund acquisition of a portion of the land. The Federal Transportation Administration announced an award for $1.5 million toward purchase of the property on January 17, 2012. The Service has applied for additional grants to help secure the total cost of $7.5 million for the property.

Although the Service considered acquisition of the Maddox family property in the 1992 Master Plan, the Service believes additional review of the acquisition is appropriate under the National Environmental Policy Act. Acquiring this land was not initially intended to be part of the CCP process; however, the Service will evaluate acquisition of offsite parking with the environmental impact statement for the CCP.

Conclusion

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service remains committed to an open and transparent public process as we continue to develop the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge CCP. We will continue to have a healthy dialogue with the public about the future management of the refuge, and be responsive to the needs and interests of the local community.

As we continue our discussions with the public, we believe it will become even more apparent that the Service and the local community share the same values – conservation of the species and habitat at Chincoteague, safe and sustainable public recreational opportunities, and a vibrant and healthy local economy. As the refuge and the community are impacted by sea level rise, beach erosion, and the effects of continued storm damage, it is imperative that we work closely together to plan for the continued management of the refuge, for the benefit of both wildlife and people.

Dr. FLEMING. Thank you.

Next we have Mayor Tarr.

You are now recognized, sir, for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. JACK TARR, MAYOR, TOWN OF CHINCOTEAGUE

Mr. TARR. My name is Jack Tarr. I am the Mayor of the Town of Chincoteague. On behalf of our full-time residents and season visitors, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and the planning process that is underway and its impacts on our Town.

I would also like to single out for special thanks Representative Scott Rigell and his staff, who has been our champion here in Washington and has stood by us during this process. Thank you.

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I would like to give you a brief history of how we got to this point. The Chincoteague Bridge and Beach Authority built the first bridge and roadway system to the beach in 1962, with the blessing of Congress, to promote economic development on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. These valuable public assets were sold to the National Park Service in 1966 to operate and maintain over four miles of seashore at the south end of Assateague Island as a public recreational beach.

The Town of Chincoteague has a 50-year history of support for the Refuge and the Assateague Island National Seashore. Our Town has worked hard to build an international reputation for the Chincoteague wild ponies, and a gateway community that supports over 1.5 million visitors to the Refuge each year.

The Virginia portion of Assateague Island is a wildlife refuge inside a national seashore park. This is different than any other wildlife refuge in the country. But the CCP doesn't even recognize public beach restoration at all. The CCP should address the relationship or agreement that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has with the National Park Service. The question of who is tasked with managing and maintaining the recreational beach is very important.

I am here today to tell you that I feel we are being railroaded into less or no beach parking and forced to ride a trolley system in the future. Before the CCP process, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began an alternative transportation study that the community thought was to promote walking trails and bicycling. I remember the first slide that Refuge Manager Lou Hinds presented that day, a crowded roadway going to the beach, and his comment was, "The American people have become too dependent on their vehicles."

The Volpe Transportation Center was the contractor who put together the alternative transportation plan, and now is the contractor selected to prepare the CCP and the environmental impact statement. We know why: It is all about public transportation. But the grant application award of $1.5 million for a park-and-ride facility on Chincoteague Island, that we knew nothing about. How can we trust anything in the CCP process?

Based on an idea presented by Refuge Manager Lou Hinds during the last two years, the Town of Chincoteague completed a questionnaire of our visitors in 2010 that indicated these changes would have a dramatic negative effect on our economy. Over 82 percent indicated they would not return if a transit shuttle replaced convenient beach parking.

In response to the CCP proposals, the Town Council has resolved:

No expansion of the Refuge or Seashore should occur on Chincoteague Island.

No transit shuttle system should be proposed that reduces convenient beach parking at the seashore to less than the existing spaces.

Alternative B, to relocate the recreation beach, cannot be supported.

The CCP should include an alternative that allows the recreational beach to remain at Toms Cove by maintaining or restoring the land base. The Town presented a 123 Common Sense Plan to be considered, but was denied.

The CCP should include alternatives that continue the current exceptional visitor experience for another 15 years. 150 ponies, 360-degree beach experience, 1000-car parking are examples. I think the CCP should have looked at what we have been doing for the last 20 years under the old Master Plan. This is the one we have built our community around. The problem is, every time we suggest how the plan that provides 1.5 million visitors and voted the number one beach town in 2011 could be improved, we are told, "It is against our policy."

Sand fencing to prevent beach erosion: against our policy, but installed in other areas.

Christmas trees to prevent erosion: against our policy.

Dune maintenance and planting: against our policy, but allowed on the northern end.

Beach nourishment: against our policy, but is allowed on the northern end of Assateague and is ongoing.

The $7.5 million that is proposed for a mass transit parking lot would go a long way to take care of the visitor facilities we already have.

Mr. Chairman, due to time, I would like to end by saying that the Town of Chincoteague, we feel, and it saddens me to say this, is under siege by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Their policy of implementing transit in parks and purchasing property in our Town limits, both ideas we oppose because they are completely unnecessary, is one that will kill jobs, crush investments, and create economic uncertainty in our town.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Tarr follows:]

Statement of The Honorable John H. Tarr, Mayor, Town of Chincoteague, Virginia

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Jack Tarr and I am the Mayor of the Town of Chincoteague. On behalf of our full time residents and seasonal visitors, I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (CNWR) and the planning process that is underway and its impacts on our Town.

I also want to single out for special thanks Representative Scott Rigell and his staff who have been our champion here in Washington and has stood by us during this process.

If I may Mr. Chairman, please let me give you a brief history for how we got to this point. . .

The Town of Chincoteague has a 50 year history of support for the Refuge and the Assateague Island National Seashore. Our Town has worked hard to build an international reputation for the Chincoteague wild ponies, and a gateway community that supports over 1.5 million visitors to the Refuge each year.

The Virginia portion of Assateague Island is a Wildlife Refuge inside a National Seashore Park. This is different than any other Wildlife Refuge in the country, but the proposed CCP doesn't even recognize public beach recreation at all.

The CCP should address the relationship or agreement that the US Fish and Wildlife Service has with the National Park Service. The question of who is tasked with managing and maintaining the recreational beach is very important.

The Chincoteague Bridge and Beach Authority build the first bridge and roadway system to the Beach in the 1962 with the blessing of Congress to promote economic development on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

These valuable public assets were sold to the National Park Service in 1966 to operate and maintain over 4 miles of seashore at the south end of Assateague Island as a public recreational beach.

I am here today to tell you that I feel we are being railroaded into less or no parking at the Beach, and forced to ride a trolley system in the future. Before the CCP process, US FWS began an Alternative Transportation Study that the community thought was to promote walking trails and bicycling.

I remember the first slide that Refuge Manager Lou Hinds presented that day. A crowded roadway going to the Beach, and his comment was "the American People have become too dependent on their vehicles."

The Volpe Transportation Center was the contractor that put together the Alternative Transportation Plan, and now is the contractor selected to prepare the CCP and Environmental Impact Statement. We know why—it's all about public transportation.

With the grant application award of 1.5 million dollars for a 'park and ride' facility on Chincoteague Island, how can we trust anything in the CCP process?

Based on the ideas presented by Refuge Manager Lou Hinds during the last 2 years, the Town of Chincoteague completed a questionnaire of our visitors in 2010 that indicated these changes would have a dramatic negative effect on our economy.

Over 82% indicated they would not return if a transit shuttle replaced convenient beach parking. In response to the CCP proposals, the Town Council has resolved:

- No expansion of the Refuge or Seashore should occur on Chincoteague Island
- No transit shuttle system should be proposed that reduces convenient beach parking at the Seashore to less than 1,000 existing spaces
- Alternative B to relocate the recreational beach cannot be supported at this time.
- The CCP should include an alternative C that allows the recreational beach to remain at Toms Cove by maintaining or restoring the 'land base' (123 Common Sense Plan)
- The CCP should include alternatives that continue the current exceptional visitor experience for another 15 years (150 ponies, 360 degree beach experience, 1000 car parking are examples)
- The CCP should include beach nourishment or other methods to restore the sheltering effect of the barrier island.

You have asked about my opinion of the four proposed alternatives in the CCP. We have been informed by Refuge staff that this may now be three choices because they would like to eliminate alternative C.

I think that the CCP should have looked at what has been working for the past 20 years under the old Master Plan. This is the one we have built our community around. Unfortunately, alternative A except that the 'status quo' option is never selected. We need to address how we can improve on that.

The problem is that every time we suggest how the plan that provides 1.5 million visitors a year and the #1 Beach Town in 2011 could be improved we are told that it is 'against our policy'.

1. Sand fencing to prevent beach erosion—'against our policy'
2. Christmas Trees to prevent beach erosion—'against our policy'
3. Dune maintenance and planting—'against our policy'
4. Beach nourishment—'against our policy'

The 7.5 million dollars that is proposed for a mass transit parking lot would go a long way to take care of the visitor facilities that we already have.

Fifty years of experience and public trust should not be abandoned in a rush to change everything and still meet a 2012 CCP deadline.

Mr. Chairman, the Town of Chincoteague is under siege by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Their policy of implementing transit in parks and purchasing property in our town limits—both ideas that we oppose because they are completely unnecessary—is one that will kill jobs, crush investment and create economic uncertainty in our Town.

We are here to ask this Committee to exercise its oversight capabilities and help put a stop to the massive over-reach of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dr. FLEMING. Well, thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Next we have Supervisor Thornton.

You are now recognized.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. WANDA THORNTON, MEMBER, ACCOMACK COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Ms. THORNTON. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, good morning. My name is Wanda Thornton, and I have served as a member of the Accomack County Board of Supervisors since 1996. My district is the Island District, which also includes Assateague Island. I am here today to talk to you about jobs and the apparent willingness of the Obama Administration and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to destroy hundreds of jobs in our community.

Our island is seven miles long, two miles wide, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service already owns 540 acres within our Town limits, and plans to purchase an additional 200 acres of already-developed business property. This business property generates significant revenue and jobs for our Town and this County. This past Monday, the Refuge Manager, Lou Hinds told our elected officials that he would continue to purchase more land on Chincoteague from any willing sellers. This needs to stop.

I own a campground on Chincoteague, and I have met visitors from all over the world who come to Chincoteague to visit our beautiful island to fish, explore, and go to the beach on Assateague, which is over a short causeway from Chincoteague. We know these families, many of whom have visited our region for decades. We talk to them about their experiences and what they like and dislike about our beach and our region's amenities.

I, along with my fellow elected officials and the business community, have shared what we have learned with the Fish and Wildlife Service and in particular, Lou Hinds, the Refuge Manager who is responsible for developing the CCP plan.

I have participated in a previous CCP plan; I participated in the Refuge Master Plan which is in existence today. I have to say that the process we are going through now is by far the most divisive and infuriating process I have encountered in my more than 20 years of public service.

You will hear from the Government that they have bent over backwards to hold public meetings, and have invited stakeholders to meet on many occasions. That is true. But what is also true is that our concerns have been ignored. We have been lied to. We have been told that no matter what we say, the Refuge Manager has 51 percent of the vote so what we say has no weight. This process underway at the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge holds the opinions of the local population in contempt.

People in the Town of Chincoteague are fearful for their jobs. They are fearful that their investments in local businesses or restaurants may be wiped out because a local Refuge Manager wants to shut down the current ocean-accessible beach and force tourists to ride into the Refuge on a mass transit system.

You may hear the witness from the Fish and Wildlife Service discuss a plan to move the recreational beach further to the north from the current beach. This plan would require the destruction of more than 10 acres of wetlands and negatively impact the habitat of the Delmarva fox squirrel, an animal on the Endangered Species List.

How exactly will the Fish and Wildlife Service get the approval from other Federal Government agencies to destroy these wetlands to create a parking lot when these same agencies protest decisions to impact wetlands throughout our country? Furthermore, our country is trillions of dollars' worth in debt, and we do not need to expend the money on something that is unnecessary.

You can easily see how we become skeptical of the Fish and Wildlife Service's claim that they are going to move the beach parking lot farther north, which is their preferred alternative. Their real plan is to develop a transit parking system, then claim they cannot build the new beach parking lot because of environmental and budget concerns. That leaves the Town right where the Refuge Manager wanted to go all along: parking outside of the refuge and a permanent loss of beach parking.

As Mr. Mayor said, we had our visitors complete a survey, and 80 percent said they will not come back. I have talked to hundreds of people in Accomack County who have no other beach to go to, who say they won't even come to our beach if they have to ride a shuttle system.

The Refuge Manager and the people at the Wildlife Service know all of this, but they evidently don't care. With this grant that they just secured, without local knowledge, so we could not have had a chance to protest it—but they had people supporting it, so it wasn't something that was unknown. It is just that the local people didn't know it, the County didn't know it, or the Town didn't know it.

We would like the Fish and Wildlife Service to immediately state that they are no longer planning to purchase property in our Town limits, and abandon their plan to do so.

We would like them to work with us to preserve the current beach parking, which is possible since they bulldozed down those dunes. They did not wash down by themselves. They took bulldozers and bulldozed them down.

In view of the time, I won't finish the other things I have to say. I will be available to answer questions at any time. And I thank you so much for allowing us to come and vent our frustrations.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Thornton follows:]

Statement of Wanda J. Thornton, Accomack County Board of Supervisors

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee:

Good morning. My name is Wanda Thornton and I serve as a member of the Accomack County Board of County Supervisors. My district is the Island District, which includes Chincoteague and Assateague Island in Virginia.

I am here to day to talk to you about jobs and the apparent willingness of the Obama Administration and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to destroy hundreds of businesses and jobs in our community.

Our Island is seven miles long and 2 miles wide and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service owns 540 acres within our town limits and plan to purchase an additional 200 acres of business property. This business property generated significant revenue and jobs for our town and the county. This past Monday, the Refuge Manager, Lou Hines told our elected officials that he would purchase more land from any willing sellers in our town. This needs to stop.

I own a campground on Chincoteague and I have met visitors from all over the world who come to Chincoteague to fish, explore and go to the beach on Assateague Island, which is over a short causeway from Chincoteague Island.

We know these families, many of whom have visited our region for decades. We talk to them about their experiences and what they like and dislike about our beaches and our region's amenities.

I, along with my fellow elected officials and the business community, have shared what we've learned with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and in particular, Lou Hinds, the Refuge Manager who is responsible for developing the CCP.

I have participated in previous CCPs at the Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge. I have to say that the process we are going through now is by far the most divisive and infuriating process I have encountered in my more than twenty years of public service.

You will hear from the government that they have bent over backwards to hold public meetings and have invited stakeholders to meet on many occasions. This is true.

But what is also true is that our concerns have been ignored, we have been lied to, we have been told that no matter what we say the refuge manager has 51% of the vote, and this process underway at the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge holds the opinions of the local population in contempt.

People in the Town of Chincoteague are fearful for their jobs, they are fearful that their investments in local businesses or restaurants may be wiped out because a local refuge manager wants to shut down the current ocean-accessible beach and force tourists to ride into the refuge on a mass transit shuttle.

You may hear the witness from the Fish and Wildlife Service discuss plan to move the recreational beach further to the north from the current beach. This plan would require the destruction of more than ten acres of wetlands and negatively impacts the habitat of the Delmarva fox squirrel, an animal on the endangered species list. How exactly will the Fish and Wildlife Service get the approval from other federal government agencies to destroy these wetlands to create a parking lot when these

same agencies protest decisions to impact wetlands throughout our region of the country? Furthermore, our country is trillions of dollars in debt; where will the Fish and Wildlife Service get the millions of dollars it will take to implement this irresponsible plan?

You can easily see how we become skeptical of the Fish and Wildlife Service's claim that they are going to move the beach parking lot as they propose in Alternative B, which is their preferred alternative. Their real plan is to develop a transit parking lot, then claim they cannot build the new beach parking lot because of environmental and budget concerns. That leaves the Town right where the Refuge Manager wanted to go all along: Parking outside of the refuge and the permanent loss of beach parking.

We have asked our visitors what they think of this idea and more than 80% of them said they would not come back to Chincoteague if they were forced to use mass transit to get to the beach. They like being able to drive to the beach parking lot where they can easily unload their beach gear and spend the day with their family. Loading a family's beach gear onto a trolley is not an experience our visitors will sign up for. There are many other options and they just won't come to Chincoteague.

The Refuge Manager and the people at the Fish and Wildlife Service know all of this and they evidently don't care. They just secured a 1.5 million dollar grant from the Sarbanes Transit in Parks program to purchase property in the Town limits to develop a transit parking lot. We have made our objections to this purchase crystal clear. Accomack County opposes moving the parking off the refuge. The Town, State Tourism Commission, the Office of the Governor of Virginia and the Virginia House of Delegates have all gone on the record and made it clear that we oppose the Refuge's plan to purchase property in the Town limits.

Our country has a trillion dollar per year deficit but the Feds are going to buy a piece of property against the wishes of the local population for a service nobody wants to use. It's easy to see why so many Americans have lost faith in their federal government.

We are here today to ask you to help us stop this reckless agenda:

- We would like the Fish and Wildlife Service to immediately state that they are no longer planning to purchase property in our Town limits and abandon their plan to do so.
- We would like them to work with us to preserve the current beach parking system which has been in place over the past five decades. There is nothing wrong with the current system that can't easily be fixed.
- We would like them to stop proposing to thin the pony herd on the Refuge.
- We would like them to develop a cost-sharing plan for repairing the beach parking lot and stop using the modest amounts it takes to repair the beach parking lot as a red-herring for their argument to abandon the beach.

And finally, we would like the Fish and Wildlife Service to become true partners in the effort to bolster the local economy while preserving the unique habitat that exists on Assateague Island. I know it can be done because it has been done for the last fifty years. The plans contemplated today by the Fish and Wildlife Service are draconian and unnecessary, will destroy hundreds of jobs and threatens the very existence of Chincoteague, Virginia.

Thank you again for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Dr. FLEMING. Well, thank you, Ms. Thornton, and thank you for observing our time limits. That is helpful so we can move along this morning.

Next I would like to recognize Ms. Payne for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF NANCY PAYNE, CHINCOTEAGUE, VIRGINIA

Ms. PAYNE. Hello. My name is Nancy Payne, and I am a Chincoteague Island resident and business owner. For 23 years, my husband and I have run an open-in-the-summers art gallery. Our first property purchased on the island was in 1979, when we bought a house located on Circle Drive, which we still own.

During our working years, we were both Alexandria-based teachers, and free to live elsewhere during the summers. We looked at several places to find a safe summer environment for our only

child, who was 5 years old at the time. Chincoteague and Assateague Islands filled our requirements.

As she grew older, our family's needs began to change, and in 1987 we bought a commercially zoned house and property on Main Street and opened a store to sell work we produce. In 2000, we sold our home in Alexandria, Virginia and moved to Chincoteague and became residents. In the meantime, our daughter married, had a baby, and moved to Salisbury, Maryland. We now have a second home there where we spend about five months each year.

In addition to running a business, I am a precinct captain and election official. Ten years ago, another person and I organized a group of volunteers to give summertime island history tours to provide additional recreational and educational opportunities for our tours. The Town's trolleys are used, and ticket sales money donated to the Town.

Issues facing us at this hearing today center on the geographic locations of Assateague and Chincoteague. They are close in miles, but each has very different needs. On Chincoteague, individuals, business owners, and private landowners are the stakeholders, and many in the population rely on money generated from the tourists who sleep, eat, and shop on our island but go to Assateague for outdoor recreation. Issues arising around these differences can create awkward situations.

For the last year and a half, Assateague's 15-year Comprehensive Conservation Plan has been debated. Refuge personnel have held advertised-in-advance meetings, and they were well-attended. Many letters and articles appeared in newspapers, and an enormous number of private discussions have taken place.

During public presentations, the full range of alternatives for consideration were talked about, generating a great deal of discussion. Audience members asked many questions, which were thoroughly answered. Graphics and charts explaining the alternatives served as backdrops for the speaker and a six-page, well-designed brochure illustrating and explaining the four alternatives handed out. I attended three of these meetings.

After careful study, I concluded plan A, the do-nothing alternative, is not a viable option since existing parking would inevitably be washed away. Barrier islands, as we all know, naturally shift and change, and people who use them for recreation or their source of income must make adjustments to these predictable changes.

Plan C advocates allowing natural secession and coastal processes to take place with little intervention, meaning parking lots would be shut down after storms damage them, and no shuttle to the beach provided. This plan would not bode well for Chincoteague. Plan D also did not bode well.

As business owners, we know it is essential for visitors to get to the beach, even when parking lots are not usable due to storm damage, making a shuttle system essential. I am so convinced that plan B was the best solution that last summer I wrote a petition supporting plan B, and we and Hal and Claire Lott, also business owners, circulated it among our customers and friends. Only business owners or residents or property owners were asked to sign.

It stated: "Petition of Support to the Assateague Refuge removing 961 parking spaces to north on the island for purchase of the Maddox family campground. Signers of the petition support the plan by the Refuge to move and maintain the 961 parking spaces to a more sheltered and secured Assateague location. They also endorse this plan to purchase the off-island Maddox family campground for the following reasons: to be available as an alternative in case the beach parking lots are lost due to summer storm or hurricane, to provide the capability of emergency parking, and for supplement parking with a shuttle service."

In total, Claire and I collected 65 signatures that were sent in. And someone who also very much agrees with me on this particular issue, too, is—this appeared in the Beacon on the paper for the 14th of July of 2011—"Beach Access and Preservation Are Not Mutually Exclusive Goals.

"I want to be very clear that I have no issue with the Maddox family selling their land. Furthermore, I do not take issue with the idea of having a backup parking site for temporary parking in the event that a storm washes out the current parking lot. I do not dispute the possibility that such a storm could occur or that an offsite backup option to help mitigate the economic damage the Town would suffer for however long it may take to rebuild the parking lot."

The writer goes on to say in another paragraph, "However, I will not support any plan that relies on a transit system as the primary means accessing the beach or that decreases the number of parking spaces within the walking distance of the beach."

The writer of this is Representative Scott Rigell.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Payne follows:]

Statement of Nancy Payne, Owner of Clouds Gallery, Chincoteague Island, Virginia

My name is Nancy Payne. I'm a Chincoteague Island resident and business owner. For 23 years my husband, Randolph, and I have run an open-in-the-summers art gallery at the corner of Maddox and Main Streets.

Our first property purchase on the Island was in 1979 when we bought a house located on Circle Drive and which we still own. During this time, our working years, we were both Alexandria-based teachers and free to live elsewhere during the summers. We looked at several places to find a safe summer environment for our only child who was 5 years old at the time. Chincoteague and Assateague Islands filled all these requirements. She rode her bike, swam in the ocean, had plenty of fresh air and room to grow. As she grew older our family's needs began to change and in 1987 we bought the commercially zoned house and property at 4296 Main Street, opened an art gallery to sell work we produce. In the year 2000 we sold our home in Alexandria, Virginia and moved to Chincoteague and became residents. In the meantime our daughter married, had a baby and moved to Salisbury, Maryland. We now have a second home there where we spend about five winter months each year.

In addition to running a business, I'm a Precinct Captain and Election Official. Ten years ago another person and I organized a group of about 12 volunteers to give summertime Island history tours four times per week to provide additional recreational and educational opportunities for our tourists. The Town's trolleys are used and ticket sales money donated to the Town.

Issues facing us at this hearing today center on the geographic locations of Assateague and Chincoteague Islands. They are close in miles but each has very different needs, objectives and goals. One's primary purpose as a National Refuge is to protect the wildlife and fragile land mass that is literally at the edge of the eastern shore. On Chincoteague individuals, business owners and private landowners are the stakeholders and many in the population rely on money generated from the

tourist who sleep, eat and shop on our island but go to Assateague for outdoor recreation. Issues arising around these differences can create awkward situations.

For the last year and a half, Assateague's 15 year Comprehensive Conservation Plan has been debated. Refuge personnel have held advertised-in-advance meetings that were well attended. Many letters and articles appeared in newspapers and an enormous number of private discussions have taken place. During public presentations the full range of alternatives for consideration were talked about generating a great deal of discussion. Audience members asked many questions which were thoroughly answered; graphics and charts explaining the alternatives served as backdrops for the speaker and a six page, well-designed brochure illustrating and explaining the four Alternatives handed out. (I attended three of these meetings.)

After careful listening, studying and thinking about the plans I concluded: Plan A: The 'do nothing' alternative is not a viable option since existing parking would inevitably be washed away. It is essential to make plans now and not allow this to happen. Barrier islands, as we all know, naturally shift and change and people who use them for recreation or their source of income must make adjustments to these easily predictable changes. Plan C: Advocates allowing natural succession and coastal processes to take place with little intervention allowing natural disturbances to occur meaning parking lots would be shut down after storms damaged them and no shuttle to the beach provided causing visitors to leave since they would not be able to get to the beach via their own vehicles. This plan would not bode well for Chincoteague's tourism economic base. Plan D: Staffing and funding would be directed towards maximizing habitat and wildlife management with the result being public use activities and access may be reduced. Again, not good for Chincoteague's economic well being.

As business owners we know it's essential for visitors to get to the beach even when parking lots are not usable due to storm damage making a shuttle system essential. We were so convinced that Plan B was the best solution that last summer I wrote a petition supporting Plan B and we along with Hal and Claire Lott, also business owners, circulated it among our customers and friends. Only business owners or residents or property owners were asked to sign. It stated: "PETITION OF SUPPORT TO THE ASSATEAGUE REFUGE: FOR MOVING 961 PARKING SPACES TO NORTH ON ISLAND, FOR PURCHASE OF MADDOX FAMILY CAMPGROUND. Signers of this petition support the plan by the Refuge to move and maintain 961 parking spaces to a more sheltered and secure Assateague location. They also endorse their plan to purchase the off-Assateague Island Maddox Family Campground for the following reasons: to be available as an alternative in case the beach parking lots are lost due to a summer storm or hurricane, to provide the capability of emergency parking and for supplemental parking with a shuttle service to the beach area."

Claire passed along her signed copies to me and I sent 57 signatures to Lou Hinds. A few other people asked to have petitions but were to send them directly to the Refuge. My conservative guess is that at least 65 signatures were generated. (A blank copy is provided for the record.)

During the last meeting I attended Lou Hinds went into more detail about the Maddox Campground which, if bought, would continue to be used for camping but run by the Refuge with only two week permits issued creating a tourist turn over that would potentially produce more Chincoteague business dollars. In addition, personally, I strongly believe that all levels of economic income should be able to afford a beach experience and having a safe, clean camping facility that is very close to the beach area would add another dimension to Chincoteague's clientele. I can envision youth groups, from churches, Boy and Girl Scouts, schools on field trips, all camping there and using a shuttle to go back and forth to the beach.

Assateague's 37 miles long coast line provides a vast amount of space for people and at least one of these meeting Mr. Hinds also make it clear that there is additional room on the beach for more people than can be transported there by 961 vehicles. Again making a strong case for a shuttle for those who either don't want to be bothered parking on the beach or for those who can't get there because the 961 spaces are filled.

As to the fear expressed by some—that the Refuge would bait-and-switch by building a parking lot on the Maddox Campground, start a shuttle system for emergency use and then get rid of all parking on Assateague—that seems to me to be over reaching in use of 'suspicion.' The Refuge is not tucked away in some remote area where such a devious trick could possibly be successful. It is known around the world, has been visited by millions of people and is very near major metropolitan cities, which are the home bases for a massive number of people. If the Fish and Wildlife Service were to go back on its word by forbidding parking on Assateague and use only shuttle buses going from the Maddox Family Campground

an extremely large number of people would have a collective fit and an "Occupy Assateague' movement would take place. But I don't expect this to happen. I feel strongly that the Refuge has been honest, open and considerate by not only focusing on their needs but also those of their neighbors on Chincoteague. They are fully aware of their position in this fragile alliance and the economic ramifications their actions could cause to Chincoteague's well-being and economic bottom line.

Other people and I agree, on this issue. I quote one of them from a 14 July 2011 article printed in the local BEACON newspaper with the title reading: BEACH ACCESS, PRESERVATION ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE GOALS. "I want to be very clear that I have no issue with the Maddox family selling their land. Furthermore, I do not take issue with the idea of having a backup parking site for temporary parking in the event that a storm washes out the current parking lot. I do not dispute the possibility that such a storm could occur or that an off-site, backup option could help mitigate the economic damage the town would suffer for however long it may take to rebuild the parking lot." The writer goes on to say in another paragraph. "However, I will not support any plan that relies on a transit system as the primary means accessing the beach or that decreases the number of parking spaces within walking distance of the beach."

The writer and the person with whom I agree is Representative Scott Rigell who has apparently requested this meeting. Had I known his views at the time I would have asked him to sign our petition! (Copy submitted for the record.)

The natural assets of Assateague are irreplaceable and I strongly respect the current policy that the recreational beach will not be replenished and dune habitat will not be actively maintained. To do so would simply be a waste of money since this would have to be constantly redone after storms did their damage. Better to put money in a real asset such as the entire Maddox Family Campground which has a consistent land mass and could be used in many different ways.

The Town and the Refuge mean a great deal to our family and to us. It is extremely rewarding to see our 9-year-old granddaughter having the same basic growing up experiences her mother had on these two very special Islands. For the mental and economic well being of all concerned I trust a more agreeable, thoughtful, respectful atmosphere will be nourished between the leaders of these two national treasures, their differences resolved and a pleasant working agreement established.

Dr. FLEMING. Thank you, Ms. Payne.

And now Mr. Chesson, you have five minutes.

STATEMENT OF SCOTT CHESSON, OWNER, BEST WESTERN PLUS CHINCOTEAGUE ISLAND

Mr. CHESSON. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee. I am here to represent the business community on Chincoteague Island and share my views on how the reduction or elimination of beach parking on Assateague Island will affect our business and residents of Chincoteague Island.

I have been active in our community and a business owner and employer for 23 years. Our island's employers and employees and residents are angry and scared. We are angry because our Federal Government seems to be on a course to turn Chincoteague Island into a ghost town. We are angry because it seems that it seems that the current management of Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge has been less than honest and forthcoming with us during the ongoing CCP.

There have been opportunities for our voices to be heard, but it would appear our words have fallen on deaf ears. This is demonstrated by the fact that our Town's leaders were unaware that the Fish and Wildlife had applied for a grant to purchase part of a campground to serve as a staging area for busing visitors to Assateague Beach. The grant award of $1.5 million came as a shock to us all since we had the assurance that the Fish and Wild-

life Service had no intentions of reducing or eliminating parking at the beach.

Unfortunately, the people of Chincoteague Island no longer view the Fish and Wildlife as our partner. They have become an impediment and a threat to our livelihood. We are scared because a future with limited access to the beach on Assateague Island via a bus service will destroy jobs, diminish property values, and close the doors of family owned and operated businesses.

Our townspeople have mortgages on their homes, business loans, children to feed and educate. It seems unconscionable that the Fish and Wildlife Service would even consider reducing or eliminating parking on Assateague Beach, given the number of lives it will destroy.

A survey by the Town of Chincoteague conducted with our island's visitors during the 2010 tourist season asked, "Do you come to Chincoteague primarily to go to the beach?" Eighty-two percent answered "Yes." Another question was, "If Assateague Beach parking was replaced by a trolley/bus system, do you believe it would have a negative impact on local business or the length of your vacation in Chincoteague?" A full 90.7 percent answered yes.

Our economy was transformed when the bridge to Assateague was built in the 1950s. Once a small seaside fishing village, our island has turned into a tourist destination and a revenue-generator for Accomack County and the State of Virginia. Our Town now boasts a total of 962 hotel rooms, 1,143 campsites, and 670 rental homes and cottages. Most if not all of these accommodations have an occupancy rate of 90-plus percent during the summer beach season.

AOL Travel named our island the number one beach town in the entire country in 2011. The beach at the Assateague National Seashore has established our island as a premier vacation destination for millions of people all over our country. A reduction or elimination of parking at the beach will change all that. Jobs will be lost, businesses will be closed, and real estate investments on the island will be worth next to nothing.

In recent days, after it was disclosed that Fish and Wildlife Service received $1.5 million to purchase part of the Maddox campground, our local Chamber of Commerce began receiving calls from concerned patrons of Chincoteague asking if the beach was going to be open this summer. One lady stated she would immediately put her house on the market because, "Once they get rid of parking at the beach, my home will not be worth anything." The negative impact of offsite parking has begun, and it is real.

My daughter Hillary and I assisted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to procure the funding necessary to build the Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center about 10 years ago. The building was named for former Congressman Herb Bateman from Virginia, who was a tremendous supporter of the Refuge and Town.

The Center is a state-of-the-art facility that provides the Fish and Wildlife Service the opportunity to educate the approximately 1.5 million visitors to Assateague Island each year. With the help from the citizens of Chincoteague, the Fish and Wildlife Service was awarded a grant of $12 million, and the Herb Bateman Center

became a reality. The reduction or elimination of parking on Assateague and the resulting diminished visitation is squandering an effort begun a few short years ago to educate the general public about the sensitive nature of our environment.

The Committee asked me to voice my opinion on alternatives proposed by the Fish and Wildlife Service. I don't support any of them, and here is why: If it is not broke, don't fix it. From a businessman's standpoint, the cost associated with repairing the beach parking in the next 15 to 20 years is just a cost of doing business for the National Park Service.

Furthermore, the cost is minuscule and is covered by the fees charged to cars entering the Refuge. The cost of maintaining the beach parking is less than the Fish and Wildlife Service would spend purchasing land for a transit staging area, and associated and ongoing costs of staffing and maintaining a bus system.

In closing, I would like to share with you the response I received when I asked the owners and operators of several larger hotels that operate on our island of Chincoteague. I asked, "How would the reduction or elimination of parking at the beach on Assateague affect your business?"

Ms. Jane Wolfe, owner and operator of the Refuge Inn: "A reduction of 20 percent of our customers would force us to close; 35 jobs would be lost."

Reggie Stubbs, owner of the Island Resort: "Eliminating or reducing parking would devastate my business. Buses would be an inconvenience to people they wouldn't experience at other places. It wouldn't work. It would put me out of business."

Jeanie Rose, the manager of Comfort Suites: "People have said they would stop coming. We are the only beach on the Eastern Shore. All of our employees are local, and I would have to eliminate jobs according to the loss of business."

Tom Derrickson, owner and manager of Hampton Inn: "It would be devastating to our island, County, and the whole Eastern Shore. People don't realize how it would affect them. Numerous jobs would be lost."

[Time expired.]

[The prepared statement of Mr. Chesson follows:]

Statement of S. Scott Chesson, Owner/Manager,
Best Western Plus Chincoteague Island, Chincoteague, Virginia

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee:

I am here to represent the business community on Chincoteague Island and share my views on how the reduction or the elimination of beach parking on Assateague Island will affect businesses and the residents of Chincoteague Island.

I have been active in our community and a business owner and employer on our Island for 23 years and I am well connected with the business community.

Our Island's employers, employees and residents are angry and scared.

We are angry because our Federal Government seems be on a course to turn Chincoteague Island into a ghost town. We are angry because it seems that the current management of the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge has been less than honest and forthcoming with us during the ongoing CCP. There have been opportunities for our voice to be heard but it would appear our words have fallen on deaf ears.

This is demonstrated by the fact that our Town's leaders were unaware the Fish and Wildlife Service had applied for a grant to purchase part of a campground to serve as a staging area for bussing visitors to the Assateague beach. The grant award of 1.5 million dollars came as a shock to us all since we had the assurance that the FWS had no intentions of reducing or eliminating parking at the beach.

Unfortunately, the business people of Chincoteague Island no longer view the Fish and Wildlife as our partner—they have become an impediment and a threat to our livelihood.

We are scared because a future with limited access to the beach on Assateague Island via a bus service will destroy jobs, diminish property values and close the doors of family owned and operated businesses.

Our town's people have mortgages on their homes, business loans and children to feed and educate. It seems unconscionable that the FWS would even consider reducing or eliminating parking on Assateague beach given the number of lives it will destroy.

A survey by the Town of Chincoteague conducted with our Island visitors during the 2010 tourist season asked: Do you come to Chincoteague primarily to go to Assateague Beach? 82% answered "yes."

Another question was: If Assateague Beach parking was replaced by a trolley/bus system, do you believe it would have a negative impact on local business or the length of your vacation in Chincoteague? 90.7% answered "yes.

Our economy was transformed when the bridge to Assateague form Chincoteague was built in the 1950s.

Once a small seaside fishing village, our Island has turned into a tourist destination and a revenue generator for Accomack County and the State of Virginia. Our Town now boasts a total of 962 Hotel rooms, 1143 camp sites and 670 rental homes and cottages. Most, if not all of these accommodations have an occupancy rate of 90+ % during the summer beach season.

AOL Travel named our Island the #1 Beach Town in the entire country in 2011. The beach at the Assateague National Seashore has established our Island as a premier vacation destination for millions of people all over our country. A reduction or elimination of parking at the beach will change all that.

Jobs will be lost, businesses will close and real-estate investments on the Island of Chincoteague will be worth next to nothing. In recent days, after it was disclosed that the Fish and Wildlife Service received 1.5 million dollars to purchase part of the Maddox Campground, our local Chamber of Commerce began receiving calls from concerned patrons of Chincoteague asking if the beach was going to be open this coming summer. One lady stated she would immediately put her house on the market because "once they get rid of parking at the beach, my home will not be worth anything." The negative impact of off-site parking has begun and it is real.

My daughter Hillary and I assisted the US Fish and Wildlife Service to procure the funding necessary to build the Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center about 10 years ago. The building was named for former Congressman Herb Bateman from Virginia who was a tremendous supporter of the Refuge and the Town.

The Center is a state of the art facility that provides the Fish and Wildlife Service the opportunity to educate the approximate 1.5 million visitors to Assateague Island each year. With the help from the citizens of Chincoteague, the FWS was awarded a grant of 12 million dollars and the Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center became a reality.

The reduction or elimination of beach parking on Assateague and the resulting diminished visitation, is squandering an effort, begun a few short years ago, to educate the general public about the sensitive nature of our environment.

The Committee asked me my opinion of the Alternatives proposed by the Fish and Wildlife Service. I don't support any of them and here is why: if it's not broke don't fix it! From a business man's standpoint, the cost associated with repairing the beach parking in the next 15—20 years is just a cost of doing business for the National Park Service. Furthermore, the cost is miniscule and is covered by the fees charged to cars entering the Refuge. The cost of maintaining the beach parking is less than the FWS would spend purchasing land for a transit staging area, and the associated and **ongoing** cost of staffing and maintaining a bus system.

Regarding off-beach parking, how will 2 or 3,000 people take refuge when an unexpected storm blows up in the middle of the afternoon and they need to take shelter? What if mom forgets the sunscreen for her little ones or her child gets sick the needs to return to their hotel room. Putting ones children in jeopardy like that is not an option. Common sense dictates that our guests will choose other destinations for their beach experience if their mobility is put in jeopardy.

Here is my alternative. Since we currently experience 5—10 parking lot closures each summer season because the parking lots are full, let's put an additional 200 parking spots there so this doesn't happen again. From a business man's standpoint, if you don't give people what they want or expect, they will find it somewhere else. Let's also give our guests a couple of new concession stands where they can purchase food and drinks. The profits from this operation can be used to offset the cost

of repairing the parking lots if there is ever storm damage or used to finance some new beach replenishment efforts.

The National Park Service manages the recreational beach area. If the FWS and the NPS work with the Town we can get all of this worked out and it won't cost the federal government anything. Where there is a will there is a way.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's so called Alternative B plan to move the current beach is a classic bait and switch. They'll tell us they're going to move the beach but it just won't happen because of environmental concerns and a lack of federal funds. Then we'll be stuck with no beach parking and a transit system people just won't use. And the architect of this effort, Refuge Manager Lou Hinds, will be long gone.

In closing, please let me share the response I received when I asked the owners and operators of several larger hotels that operate on our Island of Chincoteague: how would the reduction or elimination of parking at the beach on Assateague affect your business?

Ms. Jane Wolfe—Owner and Operator of the Refuge Inn "a reduction of 20% of our customers would force us to close. 35 jobs would be lost!"

Reggie Stubbs—Owner of the Island Resort "Eliminating or reducing parking would devastate my business. Busses would be an inconvenience to people that they wouldn't experience at other places. It wouldn't work. It would put me out of business."

Jeanie Rose—Manager of Comfort Suites "People have said they would stop coming. We are the only beach on the Eastern Shore. All of our employees are locals and I would have to eliminate jobs according to the loss of business."

Tom Derrickson—Owner and Manager of the Hampton Inn "It would be devastating to our Island, County and the whole Eastern Shore. People don't realize how it would affect them. Numerous jobs would be lost.

Many believe—and their actions make it hard not to believe—that the ultimate goal of the Fish and Wildlife Service is to eliminate any human and pony presence on Assateague Island and to gain control of Assateague Channel as well. . .as demonstrated by the recent grant award. We are all wondering where all this will lead and why our way of life is under attack from our own government.

Please do not allow Chincoteague Island to become a ghost town!

Please exercise your responsibilities as an oversight committee and help the Town of Chincoteague, Virginia.

Dr. FLEMING. I am sorry. You are a minute over, and I applaud your enthusiasm, but we do have to move along. And fortunately, they have not called votes yet.

So we will go ahead and at this point begin Member questions to our witnesses. To allow all Members to participate and to ensure we can hear from all the witnesses today, Members are limited to five minutes for their questions. However, if Members have additional questions, we can have more than one round of questioning. And I now recognize myself for five minutes.

Ms. Weber, my question, my first question, has to do with process. Now, I understand that the CCP, we now have three alternative plans. Is that correct?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir.

Dr. FLEMING. Explain to me the fact that at least according to documents we have—which, by the way, are stamped "Confidential"; I can understand why they are stamped that way—why do we already have an executed purchase, for $7.5 million, additional land? If the plan has not been determined, why have we already committed to a land purchase?

Ms. WEBER. Thank you, sir. Well, we are early in the process of developing the CCP in the NEPA process. This is still very early, and details are still being worked out, especially based on public comment.

But with that being said, as stated earlier, the 1992 Master Plan did talk about the erosion and the flooding of the Southern area where the recreational beach——

Dr. FLEMING. Yes. Let's not go back to the 1990s. Just very specifically, why buy this land for $7.5 million, when you haven't decided what the plan is going to be? Just very directly?

Ms. WEBER. So we have not purchased the $7.5 million campground. We have entered into——

Dr. FLEMING. This is not a——

Ms. WEBER [continuing]. Contract that would allow us to do so.

Dr. FLEMING. Excuse me. I am sorry. This is not an executed purchase that we have?

Ms. WEBER. No, sir. We have not purchased that land. We have not spent any dollars on that land. We are actually——

Dr. FLEMING. Well, I understand you haven't spent the money. But it is a signed contract, so——

Ms. WEBER. It allows us the option to do so. But we will not do that until the entire CCP process——

Dr. FLEMING. So you are saying this is simply an option?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir.

Dr. FLEMING. You can back out of this contract at any point?

Ms. WEBER. That is correct, sir.

Dr. FLEMING. That is not our understanding. Our understanding is that this is a committed contract that you can't back out of.

Ms. WEBER. It is an option to buy, but it is not—we have an option not to buy also.

Dr. FLEMING. There is nothing in here about an option. We will be happy to share that with you offline. It says, "Statement of Just Compensation." It is signed, executed, Joseph McCauley, Chief, Division of Realty—I guess he is in Washington—representing the Service. A number of signatures by both parties.

So I would submit to you—I was very moved—your argument to move this parking lot and the plans that you have, I was very moved by the fact that you wanted to save taxpayer money. But I find it very difficult that we would pay $7.5 million of taxpayer money for land, buying a campground, when we don't even know if we are going to use it. So that is something that we are definitely going to want to pursue.

Now, the Refuge Manager for Chincoteague was recently quoted that, "Beach access is critical to maintain the economic vitality of the Town of Chincoteague and the surrounding counties." What is your definition of access, and does it include a shuttle service from a remote parking lot three miles from the existing beach?

Ms. WEBER. All three alternatives, as drafted now, all have beachside parking. And the supplemental parking would just be there for days of overflow as well as emergency needs.

Dr. FLEMING. All right. What is the size of the parking lots in the alternatives?

Ms. WEBER. 961, I believe, are deliberated in the first two, and 480——

Dr. FLEMING. That is the existing, but I am talking about the alternatives.

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir.

Dr. FLEMING. You say there is beachside parking. How many cars would be able to park there?

Ms. WEBER. 961 parking spaces are available.

Dr. FLEMING. In the new—in the alternatives?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir, in the first and second. And I believe the third offers 480.

Dr. FLEMING. 480 on one of the alternatives——

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir.

Dr. FLEMING [continuing]. And the same exact number for the other alternatives?

Ms. WEBER. That is my understanding.

Dr. FLEMING. Now, you mentioned the cost to taxpayers, and again, I appreciate that, being a conservative. However, we are talking about the fact that these parking lots, while they do require some measure of rebuilding at times, remodeling, and what have you, but I understand parking cost is 8 bucks an automobile. That really adds up fast; that is a lot of money. So obviously, if you move that and it is less accessible, there would be fewer cars. So if you have less revenue, then obviously savings may not count for much.

Has there been a full study that compares the long-term economic impact of the existing parking situation versus the alternatives? Do we have a head-to-head comparison between the three?

Ms. WEBER. Not yet, sir, but that is part of the process. An economic analysis will be conducted as part of the CCP process.

Dr. FLEMING. And what about the economic impact to the community itself?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir. I believe all of that is included in the analysis conducted.

Dr. FLEMING. But it has not been completed?

Ms. WEBER. No, sir.

Dr. FLEMING. So just to summarize, as I am running out of time, we have a land purchase—and again, while we are offline, we are going to look at this again; but everything about this contract, and I have dealt with a lot of contracts over a lot of years, real estate—this to me is completely committed, without an escape clause. This is not a proposed contract.

But we want to verify that because, if indeed this is a committed contract, this is a violation of NEPA laws. And that is a very serious violation. So, we will definitely pursue that; and we definitely would strongly suggest that we not come to any conclusion here until all of these studies, including the impact studies, have been completed.

And with that, I will yield back my time, and I will now recognize the gentlelady from Hawaii for five minutes.

Ms. HANABUSA. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, first of all, I would like to request unanimous consent to enter into the record a letter from the Maddox family on this matter.

Dr. FLEMING. Without objection, so ordered.

[NOTE: The letter submitted for the record has been retained in the Committee's official files.]

Ms. HANABUSA. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Weber, along the same lines, there is a CCP that is in existence right now, isn't there? This is the 1992 Master Plan.

Ms. WEBER. Yes, ma'am. It is a management plan for the Refuge.

Ms. HANABUSA. And that is what is governing the decisions that are being made now?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. HANABUSA. Now, what you are in the process of doing is modifying that Master Plan, as I understand.

Ms. WEBER. That is correct.

Ms. HANABUSA. And the process that you are using—I think part of your testimony said that you are actually going out to the stakeholders first versus how you would normally do this. Can you explain to me the difference in how you are approaching this particular CCP, and why?

Ms. WEBER. Sure. The public's input and opinion is very important to us. It is very important that we have the sustained support of the local community as well as visitors from afar, that we continue to have exceptional visitor experiences.

So what we have done is we are doing extensive communication with the public and getting their input while we actually pull together and develop these alternatives. And then once these alternatives are drafted and further detailed, we allow a further 60-day comment period in addition. And so we are doing all this upfront additional communication with our public to help draft alternatives, as well as allow additional comment once they are drafted.

Ms. HANABUSA. As you can imagine, in Hawaii we deal a lot with these issues, and with Fish and Wildlife. And just so that they know, I have some issues with you, too, in Hawaii.

So let me just be clear about one thing, and that is that it is my understanding that as soon as you get to some kind of plan that you want adopted, don't you just publish that, and then it is a formal publication, and people are given the opportunity to make the responses until—and then the Director will actually step forward and make the adoption? Am I correct? That is your process?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. HANABUSA. So you are not even at the point where it has been published.

Ms. WEBER. Correct.

Ms. HANABUSA. Now, I also understand from your testimony that you have three alternatives, and there were actually more than three, and you have actually eliminated some of them. And you are down to three, and you are still discussing the three. Is that correct?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, ma'am. Based on comments that we received, we eliminated one.

Ms. HANABUSA. Now, of the three that you have, each one of those contains in it a provision of keeping part of the parking at the beach and then part offsite. Am I correct?

Ms. WEBER. That is correct.

Ms. HANABUSA. So do you know what the numbers are in each of your—just for reference, 1, 2, and 3, what the numbers are that are being kept at the beach and how many stalls are being placed offsite?

Ms. WEBER. I believe the first alternative right now is deliberating 961 status quo, the second is 961, and the third is 480, with offsite parking, I believe, possibly accommodating 200 vehi-

cles. And we understand in the last five years there has been anywhere between 5 and 20 days of overflow parking, and that is about 30,000 to 120,000 visitors that either had to wait in their cars or decided not to stay. So that is why we believe the supplemental parking would be helpful in ensuring consistent and constant visitation out into the future.

Ms. HANABUSA. So bear with me because I don't really know anything about how it looks or what—I mean, I saw the map, but that is about it.

So when you say 961 parking stalls on plans 1 and 2, isn't it true that you have 961 now?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. HANABUSA. So you are at status quo on plans 1 and 2?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. HANABUSA. Now, is there an issue as to where it is located? Is that the problem with plan 1 and 2 that has the numbers near the beach?

Ms. WEBER. Well, I haven't had direct conversation. I do believe some of the concern was that the beaches would be too far—the parking would be far away from the beach. And we are talking with the Park Service and our public regularly to ensure that they are as close as possible, and we believe the second alternative would be as proximal as where status quo is if we were to move the beach to the north.

Ms. HANABUSA. So you are going to have to move the beach to nearer the parking stalls so that they will be—what, the proximity would be identical to where it is now?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. HANABUSA. My time is running out, and I am hoping that we will have a second round. And in the meantime, if we go to votes, I would like for you to consider—the question I also do have is—and I would like for you to answer in the next round—is the relationship between Fish and Wildlife and the National Park Service, and who has jurisdiction over what.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would yield back. I am out of time.

Dr. FLEMING. The gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Wittman from Virginia for five minutes.

Mr. WITTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank all the members of the panel for joining us today. I spent many years working there on the Eastern Shore with the Division of Shellfish Sanitation, so you all are very, very close to my heart. We appreciate your service and the things that you are doing for a great community there in Chincoteague.

Mayor Tarr, let me ask you this. I understand that during the summer of 2010, there was a survey done of about 13,000 visitors to your area. Can you tell me what the results are of that study, what you found and what impact it may have, or what you think it should have, on this CCP?

Mr. TARR. Yes. I think the major impact that we saw was that 82 percent of those people polled during the survey would not come back to Chincoteague, would not return at all to go to the beach, if they had to ride a shuttle system. And to that, that is just an economic downfall for us.

Mr. WITTMAN. Based on your assessment of the economic impacts that this CCP may have on the Town of Chincoteague, do you believe that those economic impacts should be incorporated in whatever comes out of this plan?

And second, do you believe that the Park Service is providing you the opportunity not only to provide that feedback in an open forum, but also do you believe that that feedback that you are giving them of those impacts are being considered or would end up being incorporated into their plan?

Mr. TARR. Not at the present time, no, sir.

Mr. WITTMAN. All right. Ms. Thornton, I want to get your perspective from the County's perspective, and obviously, you representing that area on the Board of Supervisors, what are your thoughts about the responsiveness in how the National Park Service considers the concerns of the Town, the concerns of the County, especially at a time where we know there are some significant challenges to economies, especially rural economies in Virginia, where we know it is a natural resource-based economy?

We know how important the economics of tourism and of our natural resources are on the area. Can you give me your perspective from the County about how you believe the National Park Service is incorporating your thoughts and concerns as they develop this plan?

Ms. THORNTON. I don't think they are listening to us. The County has sent a resolution saying that we oppose purchasing any land within the Town of Chincoteague, and we oppose this grant. And the reason why is because of the economic impact on Accomack County.

As you well know, it is a very depressed area. We need all the jobs we can get, and we need to keep the revenue that is being generated there. And tourism is a big engine, like $145 million from Accomack County. That is everything that is spent.

Mr. WITTMAN. Very good. Thank you.

Ms. Payne, can you give me your perspective on what you believe the impacts are, and how the National Park Service may or may not be incorporating them into their planning process?

Ms. PAYNE. Again, I think that the impact would be a very positive impact to have a shuttle used from the Maddox campground going to the beach in times of dire need, as we had when Irene hit, the Hurricane Irene, and they had to shut down the beach. If you shut down the beach on Chincoteague, you might as well shut down the businesses because there is no way, then, for people to get to the beach if they can't park there.

So there has to be an alternative plan, and I think that is specifically what the Park Service said. This would be an alternative plan. They would still have 961 parking spaces on Assateague. In case a storm comes, then you would have to park—some people would have to park on Maddox campground.

So the impact of not having a shuttle, I think, would be tremendous.

Mr. WITTMAN. Mr. Chesson, let me get your perspective on the same question, the economic impact there and whether you believe the Park Service is incorporating that into their planning process.

Mr. CHESSON. The typical visitor to Chincoteague is a wife and kids, husband. They will load up their cars with all their beach gear, their coolers, and go over to the beach and enjoy the day. And they will not get on a shuttle system and have to endure waiting in lines, the threat of thunderstorms without shelter.

It is my opinion that no, our voices are not being heard. And I haven't seen any evidence that any of our economic concerns have been addressed.

Mr. WITTMAN. Very good.

Ms. Weber, I was interested in your conversation with us where you said that you have not had direct conversations with the parties involved with the development of this plan. I want you to elaborate on that. I thought that under code, that you are required under the regulatory adoption process to have these kinds of conversations, to have these direct conversations. So I am curious about your comment to where you said you have not had direct conversations.

Tell me, what is an indirect conversation? Or does that mean you are not having conversations at all? And if you are not, we certainly know that that is required.

Ms. WEBER. Thank you, sir, for allowing me that clarification. I sit in Hadley, Massachusetts, but our folks, our fine staff that sit in Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, have frequent conversations. So I just didn't want to imply that I had firsthand conversations, but I do understand that our folks have regular conversations and talk very often with the public. And we are very committed to continue to do so.

Mr. WITTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will go ahead and yield back. I have another question, but I will use that for the second round.

Dr. FLEMING. I thank the gentleman.

I understand that the rule vote that we were expecting has been voice voted. So it appears that when we are called to vote, it will be a one-time vote, so that is good for us. Sometimes plans go in your direction, and it did today.

I now recognize Congressman Harris, my good friend Andy Harris from Maryland, for five minutes.

Dr. HARRIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I am sorry I had to step out to the other committee for a while for some of the testimony.

But Ms. Weber, and I am going to have to ask the Committee staff because it says in your testimony that appended are, in fact, these plans, but I don't—they weren't appended in our folder. So I don't really know what these plans are.

What is the difference between the first and the second one in terms of the parking plans? And when you say alternatives and you are down to three, I assume that is three in addition to a do-nothing alternative?

Ms. WEBER. That includes a do-nothing. And I just want to remind you, we are in the early stages, still developing this, so we haven't put our draft out. But I believe that there is no difference between the first and the second alternative in beachside parking.

Dr. HARRIS. And what about in non-beachside parking in the first and second alternative?

Ms. WEBER. I believe those are the same as well, sir.

Dr. HARRIS. So somewhere in here in all this, I appeared to get the impression that once you built the offsite parking, as beach parking was washed away, you wouldn't be replacing it. Which alternative is that in?

Ms. WEBER. Well, status quo right now is we are seeing that the beach continues to erode away. And we have estimates from the Corps of Engineers that it would cost approximately $30 million to $40 million to put beach renourishment——

Dr. HARRIS. My specific question is, under plans A and B, you start with 961 beach parking. But I assume both of them have offsite parking as well. Under both plans, would you maintain those 961 spaces in addition to offsite parking, or eventually, as they get washed away, you would migrate it to offsite parking?

Ms. WEBER. We plan to have, and all our alternatives right now have, beachside parking included.

Dr. HARRIS. What happens when the next big storm comes and destroys some of your beachside parking under plans A and B? It is not a complicated question, you see. Because I truly believe that just like in Assateague, the goal is eventually to move human beings off the beach. I really do feel that. That just seems to be the way the Government thinks about these things.

So this is a very simple question because I don't have the—I don't know why it is not appended here. Under plans A and B, what happens when the next big storm washes away the beachside parking?

Ms. WEBER. Well, even though we are in the early—by the way, we also, Fish and Wildlife Service, value visitation. And people——

Dr. HARRIS. Could you just answer my question, please? I only have two and a half more minutes.

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir.

Dr. HARRIS. It has taken you a minute and a half. It is a simple question.

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir. We——

Dr. HARRIS. Unless you place no emphasis on the value of people parking at the beach, I can't understand how it has taken a minute and a half to answer that question. I just can't understand it.

Ms. WEBER. We do have emphasis on people parking at the beach. And one of the reasons that we also thought about moving north——

Dr. HARRIS. What is the difference between plan A and B with the 961 spaces? What happens to them when the next big storm comes? Do you not know?

Ms. WEBER. I believe that——

Dr. HARRIS. No, no. Do you know or not know? I don't want "I believe." What does the plan say? You are here to testify on plans. These people here, their livelihood depends on your plans.

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir.

Dr. HARRIS. Now, you are paid good money from Federal taxpayer dollars to know what is going on in the Wildlife Service. What are plans A and B going to do when the next big storm comes and washes away parking? And my citizens from Maryland want to go down—I don't know why they would want to go down to Virginia, but they want to go down to Virginia. They want to spend

money at these people's businesses, and they want to park on the beach. What happens to those parking spots?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir. We do not have all the details finalized yet, but we very much have in every one that we have beachside parking.

Dr. HARRIS. What happens to the—do you maintain the 961 spaces under those two plans?

Ms. WEBER. Status quo right now does not have that. If they keep getting overwashed like now, we are spending between $200,000 and $800,000, according to the estimates we received from the Park Service, to continue——

Dr. HARRIS. Three and a half minutes. You haven't answered a very, very simple question. Is the plan ultimately that as these beachside spaces, if they get washed away, are you going to spend the money to replace them or are you going to migrate it offsite?

Ms. WEBER. Well, we are still in the early options, but we are looking at moving the beach a mile and a half north, where it has shown that we do not have as much beach erosion.

Dr. HARRIS. So plan A and B at this point do not guarantee keeping beachside parking spaces?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir.

Dr. HARRIS. Fascinating.

Ms. WEBER. They do have beachside parking.

Dr. HARRIS. Keeping them regardless of storms. Fascinating.

Ms. WEBER. Both alternatives do, sir.

Dr. HARRIS. So your testimony now is both plans, even if those 961 spaces are washed away, both plans will restore those 961 spaces?

Ms. WEBER. Two of the three, I believe, at this time do have that, sir.

Dr. HARRIS. Plan A and B will retain all 961 spaces despite them being washed away? You would rebuild them?

Ms. WEBER. I believe at this time the second and the third do; the first allows natural processes to occur.

Dr. HARRIS. But the third doesn't have 961 spaces.

Ms. WEBER. No. I believe one of the options being looked at is 480.

Dr. HARRIS. Thank you very much.

Dr. FLEMING. The gentleman yields back.

Let's see. And next we have Mr. Rigell from Virginia.

Mr. RIGELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think the impact on the local economy, that point has been well made, and I hold that to be true. So let me focus on the investment side, Ms. Weber. You know, the good folks of the 2nd District have sent a businessman to serve and represent them, so I am very comfortable with the numbers. I hope you are as well because we are going to walk through them today.

The $7-1/2 million, would you agree that that is just the start? That is absolutely no improvements whatsoever to the property, the campground purchase?

Ms. WEBER. That would be the—I believe, yes.

Mr. RIGELL. And under the two options of the three, the beach parking at the north part of the beach—this is new parking—that would be a new investment. Correct? Requiring substantial mate-

rial being moved, the clearing of woodlands right there to—I have been there. I know the answer to the question. But it would require a major investment, would it not?

Ms. WEBER. It would incur costs, sir. I don't have those numbers.

Mr. RIGELL. They would be significant, I assure you. And also, and I think this is critical to keep in mind—it works against the very goals of the organization—it would require the destruction of habitat. I was thinking that the whole time that Lou was driving me up there. He is showing me where all these parking places would be at the north end of the beach, and I am thinking, look at the wildlife that is there now. So you be working actually working against the objective of preserving habitat.

Now, so we have got, I think, significant investment, capital expenditures, that have not yet been calculated. Both the improvements at the campground, the actual improvements of the road and the parking on the beach proper, that doesn't even begin to consider the cost of the purchase of the Disney-type shuttles. Correct?

Ms. WEBER. I don't know what costs you are referring to, but there will be costs to——

Mr. RIGELL. Shuttles. The shuttle system.

Ms. WEBER. There is a cost for the shuttles.

Mr. RIGELL. I was referring to Disney because I just have clear memories of that as well. You park in the parking lot and you are shuttled into the park.

The shuttles themselves, would you agree that that is a significant expense?

Ms. WEBER. I believe that it would be approximately $900,000 to purchase a shuttle.

Mr. RIGELL. Plus the ongoing cost of maintaining them and running them.

Ms. WEBER. Which we estimate to be approximately $200,000 a year.

Mr. RIGELL. $200,000 a year. OK. Now, there is a great disparity between what you have said is estimates as to what it has cost to replenish the beach from time to time versus what the Chairman quoted. He quoted a specific number, and you have quoted an estimate. How can we reconcile those numbers today?

Ms. WEBER. We receive our numbers from the Park Service, so I would have to go back and get those exact numbers from the Park Service, sir.

Mr. RIGELL. Do you dispute, though, that it could be significantly—that it could be the numbers that the Chairman quoted? Correct? Which were, in some cases, one-tenth of what you quoted.

Ms. WEBER. I have no way at this time to say which is the—where that came from.

Mr. RIGELL. Now, let's look at the effect on the local economy. A shuttle, by any standard, is not going to be available the moment someone gets out of their car, and then is going to be transited into the area of the beach. Correct? I mean, you don't anticipate one, as soon as someone gets out of their car, that the shuttle is just sitting there?

Ms. WEBER. Well, I imagine it would be there, if not immediately, a moment later.

Mr. RIGELL. Oh, but at some—there is going to be some delay, plus the ride in, plus getting your beach chair, your cooler, those things that make the beach experience today really unique and special. And your ability to get all of your gear out of your car, into right there on the beach.

And when these summer storms pop up in Virginia, they come up very quickly. You have young children. Are you really going to sit there and wait on the beach, waiting for the shuttle to come back around, when you see storm clouds coming from the West? No. You are going to get in your car and you are going to leave the beach.

Do you dispute—I just want to ask, one American to another—do you dispute that there would be some impact—however slight it may be in your mind, significant in mine—but however slight, some degradation of the experience, the convenience, going to a shuttle system? Do you admit that there is any inconvenience whatsoever?

Ms. WEBER. Actually, sir——

Mr. RIGELL. Please. I guess, to the point of Dr. Harris here, our time is so limited. I don't like to interrupt you. I really don't. But is there any degradation of the convenience and the appeal of Chincoteague by having to ride a shuttle system? Just a yes or no, please.

Ms. WEBER. Not necessarily.

Mr. RIGELL. No. That is where logic is thrown right out the window. This is what is wrong with America. We are regulating ourselves out of our prosperity. This is a classic example of an overly intrusive Federal Government. And as I shared with Mr. Hinds on the beach that day, I said, if you want to work together for some solution that keeps folks employed, I am with you.

But if you go this direction, I will do everything I can to stop this because you have understated the cost. We are taking property off the tax rolls in the Town of Chincoteague. So here we are in America. We are elevating our expenses. We are reducing our income. And we wonder why we are in a fiscal crisis.

So I respectfully disagree with you, and I will continue to fight for the hardworking taxpayers of Virginia and Chincoteague, and for jobs in Virginia.

Thank you for your testimony today. I yield back.

Dr. FLEMING. I believe we have completed the first round. Would the panel be up for a second round? I get enthusiastic nods. So, with that, I will recognize myself for five minutes.

I have been listening with great interest in all this. It is a little bit complex and little bit difficult to understand about movements and contingencies and so forth. And I do think that this plays into the argument for the Fish and Wildlife because, for instance, in one of these plans, the plan is to ultimately have a beachside parking lot, and that sounds great.

Unfortunately, to accomplish that, you have to get over many, many barriers. You have wetlands and you have EPA and you have all of these things, which make it unlikely that that would ever happen.

Then you have the Maddox plan, purchase of Maddox, which only begins the cost structure. That is not the end at $7.5 million. And that cuts in half the number of parking spots.

And then, even back to the other plan where you have 961 spaces beachside, as you mentioned, Ms. Weber—I am addressing you—if that gets washed out, then we are back in the same boat we are today after spending all of this money, even if we can get past the wetlands issue and EPA.

So can you make some—I mean, I am a logical thinker. I am a physician, a business person. Everything I do has got to fit some kind of logic. I am just not getting the logic. Why do we spend all this money and go through all the trouble and make all these plans, which we probably can't executive, in order to end up where we are today? Please explain that to me.

Ms. WEBER. Thank you. And just for clarifying purposes, I was just made aware that all three alternatives, Congressman Harris, would have parking lot repairs. And we would not proceed with any alternative if we didn't follow, and were in compliance with, all legal mandates. And so we believe all of our——

Dr. FLEMING. Well, I get that. But you know how it is building anything on wetlands and getting things past the EPA. It is virtually impossible. So, I mean, we are talking about a 1 percent chance of making that happen. So that is why I say, why would you want to move? I mean, I have maps of the barrier. It moves north, but it is still in the barrier. It could be washed out just as easily as the one that we have today.

So, I mean, you could think a little conspiratorial here and say, well, that is the plan. We don't want it to happen, so we make a plan that is impossible to execute. You can see that there is a little bit of cynicism based on past history and some of the things that we are seeing here today.

And so that is why I ask: Why set about a plan that is impossible to execute when even at the end of the plan, you are no better off than you are today, and there are certainly much fewer dollars? And by that, I mean a beachside parking space.

Ms. WEBER. I would like to add that we also have some data showing from 1966 to 2010 that the southern portion where the beach is now has eroded at a much faster, and continues to erode and flood at a much faster rate than where the——

Dr. FLEMING. Well, currents can change. That obviously could reverse, and it could begin at the north. I don't think that—the rate of erosion is not a very strong argument, in my opinion. So basically, you are not able today, Ms. Weber, to explain the logic behind doing this, is what I am understanding.

Ms. WEBER. Behind doing what, sir? Preparing three alternatives to provide reasonable options, or——

Dr. FLEMING. By spending lots of money to move parking lots to places that even if you could accomplish it, you are no better off than you are where you are today. That is the logic I am trying to understand.

Ms. WEBER. Actually, we believe it to be a long-term insurance policy. So not only would we have near-beach parking, but we would also be able to ensure that on overflow days or days of emer-

gency situations, we would be able to provide parking for those situations as well.

So we look at it as a longer-term viability option, while also taking into consideration the needs of——

Dr. FLEMING. Well, but these can wash out just as easily.

Ms. WEBER [continuing]. The people tomorrow.

Dr. FLEMING. I mean, the parking lots are on the same barrier. They can wash out just as easily. Is that the way we should continue to do business? I admit we have been doing business this way, where we spend tens of millions of dollars and find ourselves full-circle back where we were. I am sorry, I am not compelled by that logic.

I do want to ask, in the brief time that I have left, is how many times has the public parking lot been destroyed in the last 10 years, the one that we have today?

Ms. WEBER. I do not have that number, sir. But I do believe that we have spent approximately $2.4 million in the last five years on the parking lots that have overwashed.

Dr. FLEMING. Can you give me any idea? One time? Ten times?

Ms. WEBER. We just know it has washed several times in individual years, but we don't have the exact number, sir. I apologize.

Dr. FLEMING. All right. I see my time is up, and I believe Ms. Hanabusa is up next.

Ms. HANABUSA. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Payne, I have read your testimony, and you seem to be the person who is in favor of the movement of the parking lot as well as the purchase of the Maddox family.

Ms. PAYNE. Right. Yes.

Ms. HANABUSA. Am I correct?

Ms. PAYNE. You are very correct, yes.

Ms. HANABUSA. Now, can you tell me, there seems to be potentially this undercurrent going on in the community about the purchase of the Maddox property.

Ms. PAYNE. Right.

Ms. HANABUSA. And, in addition, to the movement of the parking lot.

Ms. PAYNE. Right.

Ms. HANABUSA. Are they mutually exclusive or are they two separate concerns?

Ms. PAYNE. Somewhat, but they are connected. Yes, they are and they aren't. I mean, yes, you have to have parking for the tourists to come. We know that. The 961 right now that are on the beach are very vulnerable because they are so close to the ocean. So to move the parking lot north into more stable ground and back a little bit away from the ocean makes sense to me.

Also, purchasing the Maddox campground would do several things. It would provide for a shuttle bus. It would provide for an additional 961 parking spaces in case they were wiped out completely on the beach. Then that would ensure the business community that tourists could always get to the beach.

That is very important. That is extremely important. That is mainly why people come to Chincoteague, is to go to the Assateague beach. And while they are on Chincoteague, they eat, sleep, buy things. So it is the base of the economy.

Ms. HANABUSA. Let me ask you this, not knowing anything about your community. When people come to stay at the hotel or at another ranch or whatever facilities you provide, is parking then on the beach or is parking at the respective facilities?

Ms. PAYNE. You mean where they stay?

Ms. HANABUSA. Right. They stay.

Ms. PAYNE. No. When you go to Assateague, there are—Assateague is a completely natural beach. Is that where you mean, where there are things directly on the beach?

Ms. HANABUSA. No. I want to know where people park when they come to stay in Chincoteague or wherever they may be staying. Do they park at the facilities that they are staying at?

Ms. PAYNE. Yes.

Ms. HANABUSA. Thank you.

Now, Ms. Weber, I gave you the opportunity to think about my question, which was the relationship between jurisdictions between yourself and the National Park Service—of Fish and Wildlife, not yourself. But what is the relationship as it affects this community?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, ma'am. We are in a memorandum of understanding with the Park Service, and they manage the beach. And we provide them funding every year through the revenues generated to help manage the beach.

Ms. HANABUSA. When you gave your opening statements a while ago, I remember the picture where you have the beach under water—I mean, the parking lot under water that was before. So I am curious, and I will share with the people who are fighting your proposal to repair and to keep parking facilities because in Hawaii, we have the most number of endangered species anywhere in the United States. And believe me, you do not see Fish and Wildlife saying that they are going to rebuild a parking facility on a beach for us.

But having said that, I am curious because I see it washed away, and I see new parking. And how do you intend to replace it if those 961 get washed away? It looks like it is just encroaching and encroaching.

And you made a statement about $30 million to $40 million it would cost the Army Corps to restore the beach. Now, how does this all play together, if it does?

Ms. WEBER. Well, we are afraid that, in the long term, that beach is very vulnerable to beachside flooding as well as erosion. And we did get early estimates from the Corps of Engineers that to renourish the beach and put in groins, as they believe would be necessary, could cost up to $30 million to $40 million, with another $2 million to $5 million every three to five years to maintain.

Ms. HANABUSA. Now, if you were to do that, that $30 million to $40 million, would that then maintain the parking lots the way—would they still be faced with parking lots being washed away?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, ma'am. That is still considered a short-term fix and not a long-term viable solution.

Ms. HANABUSA. So the amounts, you said that it was $2.4 million in the past five years. Can you provide the Committee with exactly how much it has cost, whether it is Park Service or yourself, to maintain and repair the beaches, and how frequent it is going to be?

Because it seems to be that is your decision, or one alternative is to move the beach further north, I guess, and then—because it doesn't erode as quickly. Is that correct?

Ms. WEBER. Correct. And yes, we could. I could receive those numbers from the Park Service and provide it to you.

Ms. HANABUSA. And again, just to emphasize what you said earlier, you are still in the stakeholder consultation process. There are no firm plans being made, and these are the alternatives. So the people of Chincoteague are going to have their opportunity to play into this decision?

Ms. WEBER. Very much so. That is correct.

Ms. HANABUSA. Thank you. I yield back.

Dr. HARRIS [presiding]. Thank you very much.

I recognize the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Wittman, for five minutes.

Mr. WITTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Weber, I want to go back to you on a direct point. When you go through the process of soliciting feedback, whether it is through the Regulatory Flexibility Act, environmental impact statements, tell me historically, since you work in the regional office and you have seen these efforts going into writing these plans, give me an instance where you have gotten feedback from stakeholders, from the business community, and others—give me an instance where you have taken those considerations and have incorporated them into the final version of the plan, and tell me where it has been different from the original plan that you have advertised based on the comments that you have gotten through the public comment period.

Ms. WEBER. Thank you. Most of my career has been spent working on endangered species, and I have published many plans where feedback from the local community, whether they be business owners or other constituents, have provided us very valuable input. And it has been incorporated into the economic analysis done on the critical habitat, and decisions have been made to exclude those areas from critical habitat.

Specific to Chincoteague, even though this is in the very early stages, we used to have four alternatives. But based on feedback we received about the concern about not actively managing the parking lot area, we did exclude that. We dropped that alternative.

So even though it is very early, I just wanted to demonstrate an example from this experience as well, sir.

Mr. WITTMAN. So what you are saying is that the end result is that the plan that you adopt will unequivocally include the concerns of the business community and the concerns of others about the economic viability of Chincoteague based on the plan and the location of these parking spaces?

Ms. WEBER. An economic analysis will be done, and all public comment will be considered equally.

Mr. WITTMAN. Considered.

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir.

Mr. WITTMAN. Incorporated into the plan?

Ms. WEBER. Incorporated. Yes, sir.

Mr. WITTMAN. Very good.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to yield the balance of my time to Mr. Rigell.

Mr. RIGELL. I thank the gentleman.

I have had the privilege, of course, of being on this subject area several times. And I think it is important for all of us to note that not all beach parking is equal. The plan that is proposed by Mr. Hinds, the ones that refer to moving that parking north, it is not the equivalent.

Even that isn't the equivalent because the parking as it is now, the visitor can get out of his or her car and they are literally on the beach. They are seeing the waves, and they are right there.

The two proposals that have us decimating, in my view, habitat—and that is indisputable, in my view—you are parked back, I would say, several hundred yards from the actual beach. And then you would be going over a boardwalk across wetlands to get to the beach.

So you would still have—you wouldn't be able to get out of your car—which is one of the principal attributes and real draws to the beach as it is now, is you can have your gear in your car and the things for your kids and all of that—this wouldn't be the case. Even if you could park there in the northern area, you would still be lugging stuff on your shoulders, and you just—it wouldn't be the same experience.

Now, I want to go back to this whole idea of process, Ms. Weber. Now, as you look at the NEPA process, I want to ask you just a couple of questions. Now, would you agree that at least one of the alternatives does not require the purchasing of additional land?

Ms. WEBER. All three alternatives at this time, sir, contemplate the supplemental parking.

Mr. RIGELL. Well, OK. Let me just—all right. Well, I will defer to you on that. But let me ask you this. The law requires that an EIS not be prejudiced by committing resources toward implementing one management plan while other management plans are still open for consideration.

It is true that we have several plans out there, several alternatives. Correct?

Ms. WEBER. Yes, sir.

Mr. RIGELL. Isn't it true, though, that as Mr. Hinds has stated, basically, if he could tomorrow, he would move forward—if he had the $7-1/2 million, he would move forward with purchasing that property. Is that correct?

Ms. WEBER. No, sir. We will not be purchasing any property until the——

Mr. RIGELL. That is not what he has told me. If he could buy that property, he would. So there is a material difference of fact here that needs to be determined. It has been my understanding in talking with him that they would move forward with the purchase.

Why, then, move forward with the application, the $1-1/2 million, if you are not going to go and use that money?

Ms. WEBER. Well, the FTA did tell us—we wanted to go ahead and position ourselves in case that was an outcome of it. And the FTA did tell us that they would not be granting us those funds

until after this, if indeed until it was finalized in the CCP, and if that was the alternative that was chosen.

Mr. RIGELL. The facts, as I read them, are clear, is that there is, based on the evidence, based on the action of the Department, that there is a NEPA violation that has my full attention. And we are going to give that consideration I need the attention that it deserves going forward.

I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Dr. HARRIS. Thank you very much. And I yield myself five minutes for a second round of questions.

Thank you, Ms. Weber, for getting me that answer. I am sorry that it took four minutes of questioning to actually get the answer.

You know, it is amazing. These hearings really do serve a purpose. They really bring to light what the problems with the Federal Government are when the rubber meets the road. You know, Mayor Tarr and Supervisor Thornton and Mr. Chesson, don't worry. The Government is here to help you. Don't worry. The Federal Government is here, and they are here to help you.

I am going to ask the three of you, very briefly, because I have a few other questions for Ms. Weber, as she might imagine, are things that bad that we need to make drastic changes right now? I mean, we heard that, my gosh, when those storms wash things out, we are going to have to spend now well over $10 million to create some system to get people back and forth.

I mean, I assume that your businesses—you know, look. That is the way the businesses work. You have a storm. It washes out. People come back afterwards. Really briefly, is the system that badly broken right now, Mayor Tarr?

Mr. TARR. We don't think so. I think you would have to go back and look at some of the history of why we are washing over on a regular basis. The dunes were pushed down—and I am not going to be able to tell you exactly——

Dr. HARRIS. That is part of the testimony. Thanks.

And just very briefly, Supervisor Thornton, are things really broken right now?

Ms. THORNTON. No, sir. They are not.

Dr. HARRIS. Mr. Chesson, are things really broken right now?

Mr. CHESSON. They don't seem to be.

Dr. HARRIS. Isn't it wonderful the Government is going to come in and solve your problem. Don't worry, the Government is going to come in and solve your problem.

Now, Ms. Weber, the Chairman mentioned—I mean, we have a memo here that says that the cost of the—the payroll costs, the materials, and supplies for damage repairs from the Nor'easter Ida was $34,000. Hurricane Irene was $69,000. Where the heck does the $700,000 come from in your testimony, your written testimony?

Ms. WEBER. That comes from the National Park Service, sir.

Dr. HARRIS. And I am going to ask you to ask the Chairman to supply those numbers to the Committee.

Is it really true, Mayor Tarr, that Mr. Hinds said—his comment was—because you have it in quotes in your testimony—"The American people have become too dependent on their vehicles"?

Mr. TARR. That is correct.

Dr. HARRIS. Wow, that is a pretty American approach to take from someone from the Government.

Ms. Weber, I visited up north of you at our place, and they gave me a copy of their alternatives. And I was struck by the number of times the words "climate change" appeared in it. Do you think that is the greatest threat to your Refuge, the Refuge we are talking about today?

Ms. WEBER. I believe the greatest threat to the Refuge today is beach erosion and flooding, sir.

Dr. HARRIS. And is it due to climate change?

Ms. WEBER. Some models predict so, but we——

Dr. HARRIS. Is that the greatest threat? Is the greatest threat—it is a simple question.

Ms. WEBER. I believe——

Dr. HARRIS. Is the greatest threat due to climate change?

Ms. WEBER. I do not know that, sir.

Dr. HARRIS. But you are making a plan based on future modeling, and you said the words "sea level rise" in your testimony. It says the words "sea level rise." Now, sea level rise assumes that climate change is a major issue, and it must take modeling about what the sea level rise is going to be.

I mean, I assume that if you are going to plan to spend tens of millions of dollars to help these folks when they don't really want help, you had better have a model. What model of climate change did you use in the assumptions for your plans?

Ms. WEBER. We are not using those models, sir, even though they do exist.

Dr. HARRIS. You used no model for climate change in your plan?

Ms. WEBER. We are using the past. That is why I put up the photo, sir. We are using what has happened in the past. We have already lost over 800 feet since 1967.

Dr. HARRIS. So you are not using a climate change model for the future; you are just extrapolating a line from the past? Is that—or could you get me—I am going to ask you in a question subsequent to please provide the Committee with the modeling used. And again, I assume you are doing this scientifically. I assume because you are certainly not doing it economically because these folks are telling you, it is not broke. You know, people get there.

The Representatives who represent the districts say, look. Their people aren't complaining about it. I don't get complaints from my people that they have to wait in line in a car when they unfortunately drive south of the border to Virginia.

So something has to be driving this. And my suspicion is, is because I saw the same thing happen up north when I visited, is that there is an overwhelming bias from this Administration, and it trickles down to every level, in that, oh my God, we have to protect against this tremendous climate change that is going to occur, and the sea level rising up to 30 feet.

Let me tell you, I represent the Eastern Shore of Maryland. If that sea level rises the way some of these projections are, the last thing we have to worry about is the beach. It is the last thing we are going to have to worry about.

So just again, I look forward to seeing the final copies of this. I guess I am going to have to make a trip down there and see this

personally. Now I am going to have to cross that border into Virginia. I will visit you, Mayor.

And I am going to yield back the balance of my time and recognize the Representative from the district, Mr. Rigell.

Mr. RIGELL. I thank the Chairman. And Ms. Weber, I would like for us to continue our conversation.

Would you agree that the creation of the parking lots, those proposed in the north of the beach at present, would actually destroy acres of what are now currently woodlands?

Ms. WEBER. I don't believe—we are still in the process of looking where the best placement would be, sir. No final decisions have been made.

Mr. RIGELL. No. There is a specific—we need to deal with reality here. There is specificity in this matter. I was taken by Lou and shown where the parking lots would go, or their approximate position. But it is not in dispute that the two options include the destruction of what is currently woodlands. Can we agree on that?

Ms. WEBER. No, because I don't believe any final decision is made. But I do——

Mr. RIGELL. You are stretching the bounds of common sense, logic, and the English language here. I do not take any pleasure in zeroing in on this, but I have a duty to the citizens of the Commonwealth and those I have the privilege to represent and my children and grandchildren.

It will require the destruction of what is now woodlands. There is no alternative to that. There is no parking there presently. The options say that we are going to create parking for hundreds and hundreds of cars. Logic demands that bulldozers push over the trees and all the habitat that we all want to protect. I do not concede this point to you.

Now, second, I do not concede your point that perhaps it may reduce—or not necessarily so, was your point—that it wouldn't necessarily reduce the attractiveness of using the beach to have to ride a trolley system. Is that still your testimony, that having to ride a shuttle versus the convenience of being able to pull right up, see the waves and the beach, and let your kids out, is it still your testimony that it is not necessarily going to impact the attractiveness of going to Chincoteague to have people be forced to ride a shuttle system?

Ms. WEBER. Sir, in my mind I was thinking about those poor folks that have to wait in their car until the 961st person leaves. I was just thinking that it might be more preferable to them to be able to park and ride a shuttle in rather than wait for——

Mr. RIGELL. Help me to understand your point, so I want to give you credit here. You are thinking of the 961 people?

Ms. WEBER. Well, there are 961 spaces, and this is just supplemental parking that the shuttle would be accommodating. And so I was thinking about those folks that have to wait until somebody leaves, until a parking space became available. So I thought they might even be looking at it as beneficial, so that they didn't have to wait in their car, whether it be hot or not, and be able to get to the beach in a sooner manner.

Mr. RIGELL. Sooner than what? Waiting?

Ms. WEBER. Correct, in their car. When there are no spots left, people either leave or they wait in their car in a line until there is availability.

Mr. RIGELL. You know, to Ms. Payne's point earlier—and I have discussed this with the Mayor and others—if we knew that the beach parking was going to be preserved and replenished, which is, I think, the right plan, I will be happy, Ms. Payne, to stand by exactly what I said.

If we wanted to set aside some parking offsite as a reserve to be used only in the reserve, but we had a definitive written agreement that the parking was going to be preserved on the beach and replenished because it is the most cost-effective approach, I would work with you on that.

Ms. PAYNE. May I just say that that is—again, from what you said in the letter that was in the Beacon from you, you seemed to indicate that you supported all of this.

Mr. RIGELL. No.

Ms. PAYNE. I was very happy to read this letter because I thought things were going to get a lot better.

Mr. RIGELL. Ms. Payne, here is the critical difference between, I think, your interpretation of what I said and what I mean here, is this, is that I only support the purchase of the property offsite if there is an absolute, absolute assurance that the current parking, the 900-plus parking spaces that we currently have, we have the agreement of the Service that it makes sense for a host of reasons to preserve it and to agree to replenish it.

The city has made multiple efforts to reach out here to help supplement the funding there. And also, the city itself wrote a letter to the Service saying that they would be very open to having their own kind of emergency transit system set up—correct, Mayor?

Mr. TARR. That's correct.

Mr. RIGELL. And to my knowledge, there has been no reply whatsoever to that letter.

So I don't think there is a—in summary, if I may—will the Chairman yield just an additional minute?

Dr. HARRIS. Yes. We will yield.

Mr. RIGELL. I appreciate the Ranking Member—thank you so much. I serve on the House Armed Services Committee, and it is very sobering to hear the Chairman, or former Chairman, of the Joint Chiefs testify that the greatest threat to this country is our national debt and interest on our national debt.

The Service has failed to make the case, in my view, that this need is so urgent, so compelling, that we have to borrow from our children and grandchildren to do this. It is indisputable in my view that the costs are far greater than what you have testified here today, that the expenses of operating it have not been truly considered.

Nor have you considered and factored in the loss of revenue to local economy and the families that would be devastated by this. I know what it is like to run a small business and to not be able—you look at the payroll and you can't make it the next week.

And this indisputably would hurt the company. I think it works against the very goals that the President has put forth in job cre-

ation. So I oppose it today for a host of reasons—environmental, process, NEPA, cost.

And I respectfully ask that you just put a full stop to this, and work with the city and the good folks and the local wisdom of the Town of Chincoteague. And thank you again for being here.

Thank you to all of our guests today. Thank you for testifying. I yield back.

Dr. HARRIS. Thank you, Congressman Rigell.

I would like to thank all our witnesses for their valuable testimony. I would like to compliment Congressman Rigell for his tireless dedication on behalf of his constituents in Chincoteague. I do want to ask unanimous consent to have the following items added for the record:

Congressman Rigell's letter to the Director of Fish and Wildlife Service;

A resolution from the Town Council of Chincoteague opposed to acquisition of the Maddox family campground;

A resolution from Accomack County Board of Supervisors on the land purchase;

A letter from Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce;

Signed contract between Fish and Wildlife Service and Wayne Maddox and Mary Lou Birch to buy the Maddox family campground;

Notice of grant award from the Department of Transportation;

Application for Federal assistance under the Paul Sarbanes Transit in the Parks Program, signed by the Fish and Wildlife Service;

Three articles from the Washington Post;

Damage estimates on Hurricane Irene, a nor'easter, from the Fish and Wildlife Service;

News release from the Fish and Wildlife Service announcing the $1.5 million Federal grant from dot; and

An article in the Beacon written by Congressman Rigell. Without objection, so ordered.

Dr. HARRIS. Members of the Subcommittee may have additional questions for the witnesses, and we ask you to respond to these in writing. The hearing record will be open for 10 days to receive these responses.

I want to thank the Members and their staffs for their contributions to the hearing.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:16 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[Additional material submitted for the record follows:]

[A letter from The Honorable E. Scott Rigell to the Director of Fish and Wildlife Service follows:]

January 17, 2012

Mr. Dan Ashe
Director
United States Fish & Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive Mailstop 330
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Director Ashe,

I was disturbed to receive notification today that the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (CNWR) applied for and was awarded a $1.5 million dollar Federal Transportation Administration grant through the Sarbanes Transit in Parks program for a "Chincoteague Park and Ride Facility". This project is not supported by the local community and is blatantly out of order with respect to the Refuge's ongoing Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). Moving this project forward ahead of the CCP undermines the integrity of the public process required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and raises a number of ethical questions.

As you may know, the CNWR is home to a very popular and easily accessible public beach, which makes Chincoteague one of the most visited attractions in the Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge attracts nearly 1.5 million visitors per year, due in no small part to the exceptional accessibility of the public beach. The economy of the Town of Chincoteague depends heavily on tourist dollars brought in by beachgoers. Consequently, the town is very sensitive to potential changes within the Refuge.

More than a year ago, Chincoteague officials made me aware of their concerns that Refuge managers plan to use the NEPA mandated fifteen year CCP to significantly alter beach access by replacing the current parking lot with a transit system which would require beachgoers to park off site and take a shuttle to and from the beach. Town officials adamantly oppose such a system which would cause a significant decline in tourism and economic activity in the town.

While NEPA requires a public, open, and transparent CCP process, town officials have expressed their concern that Refuge managers seem intent on installing a transit system without regard for the will of the public or the local economy. I have met with Refuge Manager Lou Hinds multiple times and each time he has assured me that these concerns are not warranted.

In my view this grant lends credibility to the town's fears that Refuge managers have already decided on their plan and that the public process is nothing more than a pro forma exercise with a foregone conclusion. This makes a mockery of the NEPA process and the intent of Congress. To be clear, I see this as a classic example of a paternalistic federal government imposing its will without regard for the will or economic well being of the people.

I expect an immediate and clear answer to the following questions:

1. My staff and I have been in constant contact with Lou Hinds for the past year. In that time he failed to mention that he had applied for this grant. Why?
2. The CNWR is purchasing property for a "Chincoteague Park and Ride Facility" while the official CCP is still in its early stages. In light of this, how can anyone be expected to have confidence in the public process? How can we believe serious consideration is being given to draft alternatives that do not call for a public transit system?
3. What weight do local economic considerations carry in the CCP process?
4. If the beach parking is replaced with a Park and Ride Facility, will Refuge visits decline? If so, what will be the level of decline? How will this impact the Chincoteague economy?
5. If the final CCP eliminates all or some of the beach parking, one result will likely be loss of local jobs. How many lost jobs does the FWS consider acceptable?

Please respond to these questions in detail by Tuesday, January 24, 2012.

Anyone who has spent any time in Chincoteague understands intuitively that the local economy is inextricably linked to the public beach. I take it as a given that any conservation plan which makes the beach more difficult to access will drive tourists away causing fewer people to partake in all that Chincoteague has to offer. Businesses will suffer and jobs will be lost. I will do everything in my capacity as a Member of Congress to prevent that from happening.

Yours in Freedom

Scott Rigell
Member of Congress

[House Joint Resolution No. 226, 112th Congress follows:]

2012 SESSION

INTRODUCED

12103826D

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 226

Offered January 20, 2012

Memorializing the U.S. Department of the Interior to oppose the federal purchase of land within the Town of Chincoteague.

Patron—Lewis

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, an Alternative Transportation Study was prepared for Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in December 2009 by the John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center; and

WHEREAS, several alternative strategies propose to reduce or eliminate personal vehicle use at the current beach front parking lots in favor of a transit shuttle during the peak season; and

WHEREAS, this study and the draft Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) alternatives propose the acquisition of property within the Town of Chincoteague for remote transit parking; and

WHEREAS, a specific 200 acres of developed and open space property was identified by the draft CCP to be acquired for said remote transit parking; and

WHEREAS, the loss of private investment, jobs, and tax revenue would adversely impact the Town of Chincoteague and Accomack County economies; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Chincoteague submitted a questionnaire to over 13,000 summer visitors to the Refuge in 2010, in which over 82 percent of responders stated they would not return for another visit if transit from a remote parking lot to the beach was provided; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the U.S. Department of the Interior be urged to oppose the federal purchase of land within the Town of Chincoteague; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit copies of this resolution to Ken Salazar, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, and to the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the President of the United States Senate, and the members of the Virginia Congressional Delegation so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.

INTRODUCED

HJ226

[A letter submitted for the record by Ted Lewis, President, Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce, Chincoteague Island, Virginia, to The Honorable Jack Tarr, Mayor, Town of Chincoteague, follows:]

6733 Maddox Blvd.
Chincoteague Island, VA 23336

(757) 336-6161
Fax (757) 336-1242
chincochamber@verizon.net
www.chincoteaguechamber.com

February 8, 2012

The Honorable Jack Tarr
Mayor Town of Chincoteague
6150 Community Drive
Chincoteague, VA 23336

Dear Mayor Tarr:

I am writing to let you know the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce is concerned about the negative effects of the recent announcement of a grant award made by the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks program in the amount of 1.5 million dollars and issues related to the CCP.

As you know the Chincoteague Chamber works diligently to promote tourism to the Island. In 2011 our chamber website had over 115,500 hits. We answered over 10,000 phone calls and assisted 13,000 visitors in the chamber office. In addition to these numbers, we distributed 110,000 visitor's guides, answered over 1500 emails, hosted travel writers and journalists and staged the Oyster Festival, Seafood Festival, Easter Decoy Show and Christmas Parade to bring people to the Island.

The Oyster Festival is held on Saturday of Columbus Day week end at Maddox Family Campground. This year is the 40th Anniversary and a celebrated tradition families have enjoyed for many years because the event is held during the 3-day weekend. The total revenue for the Chamber is in excess of $100,000 for the one day event. The 2700 attendees come from Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey and Virginia filling the motels, campgrounds, B & B's, restaurants and shops for the holiday weekend. The loss of the event by federal purchase of the campground would be a hardship on our Chamber. Lodging and food businesses comprise about two-thirds of the tourist-related business in Chincoteague. Tourism not only generates revenue for these sectors, but also generates revenue for the town in the form of food and lodging excise taxes. The loss of the revenues for this weekend alone would be serious.

We are getting numerous phone calls and written concerns regarding the future of Chincoteague. The Oyster Festival, which is now in jeopardy, is a proven economic boost for our local businesses. Property values are in question and real estate sales have been lost because of the uncertainty of the future. The CCP alternatives presented last summer have proposed a beach relocation and reduced parking with a transit shuttle. We are hearing visitors say they are making vacation plans to visit other areas because of the possibility of drastic changes at Assateague Beach and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. If we do not resolve this problem, it will be devastating to our economy!

Sincerely yours,

Ted Lewis

Ted Lewis
President

[Resolution of Accomack County Board of Supervisors approved February 15, 2012, submitted for the record follows:]

RESOLUTION OF ACCOMACK COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS IN OPPOSITION TO THE FEDERAL PURCHASE OF LAND WITHIN THE TOWN OF CHINCOTEAGUE

WHEREAS, a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) 20-year planning process has been underway for Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge with significant involvement and concern from the Town of Chincoteague and Accomack County; and

WHEREAS, several plan alternatives proposed would reduce or eliminate beach front parking of personal vehicles in favor of a transit shuttle during the peak season; and

WHEREAS, with no notice to the Town of Chincoteague or Accomack County, the USFWS applied for and was awarded a Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks program grant of $1.5 million for a park & ride facility, which appears to suggest a desire to achieve a pre-determined outcome in the CCP planning process; and

WHEREAS, a specific 200 acres of developed and open space property was identified by the draft CCP to be acquired for said remote transit parking; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Chincoteague submitted a questionnaire to over 13,000 summer visitors to the Refuge in 2010, and over 82 percent of responders stated they would not return for another visit if beach access is by transit from remote parking; and

WHEREAS, the loss of private investment, jobs, and tax revenue from both the loss of the tourism business on the property and the loss of beach visitors would severely adversely impact the Town of Chincoteague and Accomack County economies.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Accomack County Board of Supervisors hereby declares its opposition and urges the U.S. Department of the Interior to oppose the Paul S. Sarbanes grant sought without notice to the localities and the federal purchase of any land within the Town of Chincoteague; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this Resolution be forwarded to Ken Salazar, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, and to the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the President of the United States Senate, and the members of the Virginia Congressional Delegation so that they may be apprised of the sense of the Accomack County Board of Supervisors in this matter.

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the Resolution approved February 15, 2012, at a meeting of the Accomack County Board of Supervisors, Accomack County, Virginia.

Steven B. Miner, County Administrator
& Clerk to the Board of Supervisors

2/16/2012
DATE

The documents listed below have been retained in the Committee=s official files:

1. Land Purchase Agreement from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2. Maddox, Wayne, Letter to Chairman Fleming submitted for the record
3. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Application to the Department of Transportation to Obtain Money from the Paul Sarbanes Transit in the Parks Program submitted for the record
4. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service News Release
5. Washington Post, Three articles submitted for the record
6. Virginia Beacon newspaper article submitted for the record

[Resolution of Town of Chincoteague, Virginia, approved December 5, 2011, follows:]

RESOLUTION
To Oppose the Federal purchase of land within the Town of Chincoteague

WHEREAS, an Alternative Transportation Study was prepared for Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in December 2009 by the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center; and

WHEREAS, several alternative strategies propose to reduce or eliminate personal vehicle use at the current beach front parking lots in favor of a transit shuttle during the peak season; and

WHEREAS, this study and the draft Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) alternatives propose the acquisition of property within the Town of Chincoteague for remote transit parking; and

WHEREAS, a specific 200 acre developed property was identified by the draft CCP that, if acquired with taxpayer money, would end a 30 year old family business; and

WHEREAS, the loss of private investment, jobs and tax revenue would adversely impact the Town of Chincoteague and Accomack County economies; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Chincoteague completed a questionnaire of over 13,000 summer visitors to the Refuge in 2010 in which over 82% stated they would not return for another visit if transit from a remote parking lot to the beach was provided;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Town Council of the Town of Chincoteague opposes the expansion of National Wildlife Refuge or National Seashore boundaries within the Town of Chincoteague; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town Council of the Town of Chincoteague requests assistance from our Congressional delegation to assure that such actions do not occur.

ADOPTED on this 5th Day of December, 2011.

I certify that the foregoing is an accurate copy of the Resolution adopted by the Council of Town of Chincoteague on December 5, 2011.

John H. Tarr, Mayor

Attest:

Robert G. Ritter Jr., Town Manager