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CHIEF OF STAFF

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

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JEFFREY DUNCAN
DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

March 16, 2012

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James Moran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Moran:

As Members of Congress, who value our National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's finest network of protected lands and waters, we thank you for the funding you have provided in the past. We request your continued support for the Refuge System in the FY13 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill at the level the President has recommended: \$494.8 million.

The Refuge System has been under increasing fiscal strain. It has an operations and maintenance backlog of over \$3 billion. This has resulted in severe shortages for law enforcement and visitor services, and reduction of vital monitoring of wildlife and upkeep of facilities. Over the last twenty-two months the refuges have fallen even further behind, due to the need to respond to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. More than 500 of the Refuge System's 3,700 employees were required to deal with that disaster, spending in excess of 3,800 work-weeks away from their normal duties.

We fully recognize the fiscal challenges our nation faces, but failing to support the modest request of \$494.8 million for FY13 will only further exacerbate the downward pressures on our refuges. The Refuge System's operations and maintenance budget has declined from \$503 million in FY10 to \$485 million in FY12. Yet an analysis by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement entitled, "Restoring America's Wildlife Refuges 2011, Assets for All Americans", estimates that \$900 million is needed annually to sustain the operations and long-term integrity of the refuges.

Wildlife refuges are indeed important assets for all Americans. Over 44 million people visit refuges in every state and territory each year to hunt, fish, observe the wildlife, and engage in other forms of recreation. This generates \$1.7 billion in sales for businesses in local communities, supports nearly 27,000 jobs annually, and contributes over \$185 million in tax revenues. In fact, every dollar invested in our Refuge System by the federal government returns about four dollars in economic activity.

Thank you again for your leadership in safeguarding our National Wildlife Refuge System as the world's finest. We urge you to continue the funding needed to ensure that this vital part of America's natural heritage is sustained for the benefit of the communities we represent today and conserved as a legacy to those who will come after us.

Sincerely,

WIKI

GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN

Alcee L. Hastings
ALCEE L. HASTINGS

Pierluigi
PEDRO R. PIERLUISI

Mazie K. Hirono
MAZIE K. HIRONO

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ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

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MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO

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CHARLES B. RANGEL

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LAURA RICHARDSON

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JOHN D. DINGELL

Bob Filner
BOB FILNER

John Conyers, Jr.
JOHN CONYERS, JR.

Gwen Moore
GWEN MOORE

Ben Ray Lujan
BEN RAY LUJAN

Grace F. Napolitano
GRACE F. NAPOLITANO

Niki Tsongas
NIKI TSONGAS

Eni Faleomavaega
ENI FALOMAVAEGA

Lois Capps
LOIS CAPPS

Edward J. Markey
EDWARD J. MARKEY

Chellie Pingree
CHELLIE PINGREE

Dave Loebsack
DAVE LOEBSACK

Al Green
AL GREEN

Gerald E. Connolly
GERALD E. CONNOLLY

Tim Bishop
TIM BISHOP

Ruben Hinojosa
RUBEN HINOJOSA

Mike Quigley
MIKE QUIGLEY

Pete Stark
PETE STARK

John Garamendi
JOHN GARAMENDI

Judy Chu
JUDY CHU

Jan Schakowsky
JAN SCHAKOWSKY

Donna M.C. Christensen
DONNA M.C. CHRISTENSEN

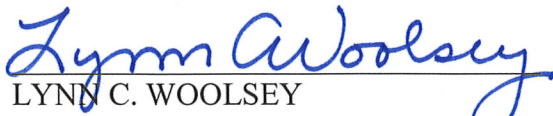
Raul M. Grijalva
RAUL GRIJALVA

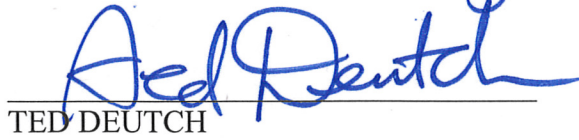
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JOE CROWLEY

Earl Blumenauer
EARL BLUMENAUER

Zoe Lofgren
ZOE LOFGREN

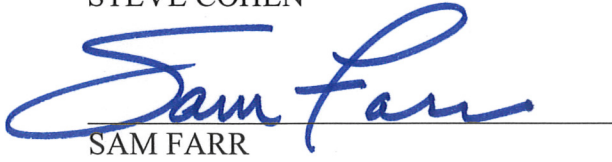
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BILL PASCRELL, JR.


LYNN C. WOOLSEY

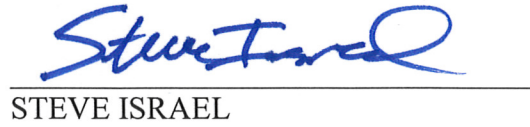

TED DEUTCH


RON KIND


STEVE COHEN


SAM FARR


JOHN P. SARBANES


STEVE ISRAEL


FREDERICA WILSON


DENNIS J. KUCINICH