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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3303

January 30, 2013

The Honorable Dan Ashe
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C St., NW, Room 3331
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Dear Director Ashe:

Late last year the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) asked for public comment on its *Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Expansion of Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge*. I am contacting you to express my opposition to any expansion of the Pocosin Lakes Refuge. Expanding the refuge at this time would be ill advised for several reasons.

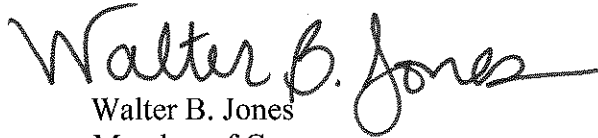
First, American taxpayers can't afford it. Over the last several years the Service has repeatedly testified to Congress that it does not have the financial resources to adequately manage the refuge lands it already controls. The simple fact is the United States is nearly broke. America's public debt is over \$16 trillion. Over \$1 trillion in deficit spending is being added to that debt every year. Much of the debt is owned by foreign nations like China, which do not have our best interests in mind. It makes zero sense for the federal government to purchase additional land for the refuge and then force taxpayers to borrow more money from China to maintain that land, to the extent that it is maintained at all.

Second, local communities can't afford it. The Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge includes over 110,000 acres. Because federal land is removed from the local tax base, the three counties in which the refuge is located (Hyde, Tyrrell and Washington), already have difficulty meeting the needs of residents. If the Fish and Wildlife Service implements its draft proposal and takes another 11,000 acres off the local tax rolls and out of productive private use, local communities will be even more hard pressed to meet their needs.

Third, the local economy can't afford it. Over the past several years, the Fish and Wildlife Service has repeatedly attempted to use its Eastern North Carolina refuges as leverage to block economic activity in surrounding areas. This is appalling, especially since unemployment rates in these areas are some of the highest in the state. In these communities that sorely need jobs, there is little public enthusiasm for giving the service even more land to use as a club to beat back economic growth.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the Fish and Wildlife Service to terminate all further action on its proposal to expand the Pocosin Lakes Refuge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Walter B. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress

Cc: Cindy Doehner, Southeast Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Howard Phillips, Refuge Manager, Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge
Pam Wingrove, Natural Resources Planner, North Carolina Coastal Refuge Complex