



March 29, 2022

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, and all Members of the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife:

On behalf of our more than one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) writes to express support for H.R. 6427, Red River National Wildlife Refuge Boundary Modification Act, and H.R. 6734, Keep America's Refuges Operational Act of 2022, being heard before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife on March 29, 2022.

H.R. 6427, Red River National Wildlife Refuge Boundary Modification Act

TWS supports the Red River National Wildlife Refuge Boundary Modification Act, which would expand the acquisition boundary of Red River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in northwestern Louisiana by 3,300 acres. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only system of federal public land to focus exclusively on protection of wildlife and its habitat, and expansion of the Refuge System should play a key role in achieving the Biden Administration's America the Beautiful goals and combating the climate and extinction crises. Red River NWR protects bottomland hardwood forests and wetlands and provides habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds and wildlife in the Central and Mississippi flyways. This 3,300-acre expansion would allow the Fish and Wildlife Service to more effectively protect important habitat for waterfowl. The Refuge System focuses not only on wildlife protection, but also the "Big Six" public priority uses, including hunting, fishing, environmental education and interpretation, and wildlife viewing and photography. In 2020, Red River NWR welcomed 209,000 visitors. Expansion of Red River NWR will provide additional opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation. For these reasons, TWS urges the Committee to advance H.R. 6427.

H.R. 6734, Keep America's Refuges Operational Act of 2022

TWS strongly supports the passage of Keep America's Refuges Operational Act of 2022, sponsored by Representative Hakeem Jeffries. This legislation would reauthorize the Refuge System's volunteer, community partnerships, and education programs. First authorized in 1998, these programs have since been reauthorized several times through bipartisan legislation. Not only do these programs help connect communities to nature, but they also help enhance and

improve the Refuge System. With the Refuge System's increasingly limited resources and increasing land base and visitorship, volunteers and partnerships are even more important to the health and vitality of the Refuge System. Since 2010, the Refuge System has lost 1,000 FTE positions. While volunteers and partnerships are not a substitute for Congress providing robust appropriations for the Refuge System to address these funding needs, these programs are still critical to supporting the Refuge System. In 2021, volunteers donated 68,879 hours of their time in restoration, interpretation, and maintenance projects, the equivalent of about 318 full-time staff. In addition, there are nearly 200 Friends groups across the country supporting the mission of the Refuge System. TWS strongly supports reauthorization of these popular and essential programs, and we urge the Committee to advance this legislation.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Drew McConville

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Drew McConville". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "D".

Senior Managing Director, Government Relations

The Wilderness Society