

U.S. House of Representatives

**Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries**

Legislative Hearing on HR 839, HR1809, HR2293 and HR2316

Testimony of John Roley

April 8, 2025

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing today.

My name is John Roley, and I worked in the Littlefield area of Texas for more than 45 years. I had a successful career in the automotive industry and am an active rancher in the Littlefield area.

I own 3800 acres of land in Hockley, Bailey and Lamb County Texas, and have always been a thoughtful steward of the land. For example, I was recently recognized as a Lone Star Land Steward for the work I have done on my Little Las Vegas Ranch property where I have restored nearly 1400 acres back to native habitats which have helped local species flourish there, and I've made efforts to make the land accessible for hunting and educational activities.

My 2,200-acre Little Las Vegas Ranch sits on the eastern edge of the Yellowhouse Draw, an area described by Francisco de Coronado in 1542 as the "Casa de Amarillos" due to the low yellow hills. The property is home to numerous quail, Texas horned lizards, mule deer and white-tailed deer. The property is grazed on an as needed basis to manage the periodic regional droughts and is leased for hunting. The first 380 acres acquired were planted back to native grasses and wildflowers with funds intended to help preserve the lesser prairie chicken population in the area.

Since then, additional restoration on old crop fields has resulted in the re-establishment of more than 1,000 acres of native habitat across the landscape. In addition, the restoration of multiple playa wetlands on the property has enhanced its usability for ducks, cranes, geese and other migrating birds. The ranch has undertaken multiple efforts to make the property more suitable for wildlife while also allowing access to 4-H groups, Littlefield Independent School District outdoor education opportunities and an all- women's and new hunter dove hunt. In addition, the ranch allows access for dove trapping and banding conducted by TPWD.

I am also a Republican, a Trump supporter and staunch advocate of private property rights. In my mind, no one, and particularly not the federal government, should have the right to tell a private property owner who they can or cannot sell their land to. It is a fundamental part of our property rights system in America to retain the freedom to do with my land as I see fit. Whether that is to sell it for conservation or development. Landowners should be free to use or develop their property as they see fit and should not be told by any other party who to I may sell or given an interest in my land to, if I so choose. That's an important part of what being an American is about.

And frankly that is why I am here today to oppose the bill HR 839 that would prohibit the implementation of the Land Protection Plan for the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge. After going through a public process and consulting with partners, nearly one year ago the Service released the final Land Protection Plan for the refuge.

The updated plan made a significantly larger acquisition boundary for the Service, aiming to help conserve up to 700,000 acres of land. This broader, landscape approach enables the Service to work with landowners – on a voluntary basis – to address the significant challenges of habitat fragmentation and other impacts across the landscape in the Southern High Plains. This plan will also help protect important and beautiful animals like the sandhill crane and pronghorn.

Most important of all, the plan also respects the rights of private property owners within the new acquisition boundary. The Service has been very clear that any acquisitions of private lands for ownership or easement purposes would be on a voluntary basis with willing sellers. As a landowner, I see this as an opportunity, not a threat, to support the maintenance of these lands, places and species that I care so deeply about.

HR 839 would restrict my ability to donate, either the fee or an easement interest, my property to the Fish and Wildlife Service. This bill impedes my ability to take action to be a positive part of conservation across the Southern High Plains. And more importantly, this bill infringes on my right as a landowning American to sell or donate my property to whomever I please.

Congress should not be in the business of telling landowners to whom they can or cannot sell or donate their land. If I wanted to donate or sell my land to an oil company, a developer, or to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, that is my right to do so. This bill would unfairly restrict that right, and the rights of other Americans to exercise their own control over their own lands. I believe this bill is bad policy and, if enacted, would represent an infringement on my rights as a property owner.