



Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, Inc.

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March 9, 2026

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Chair, Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
House Natural Resources Committee

Dear Representative Hageman,

On behalf of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation and our 125,000 member families across the state, we appreciate the House Natural Resources Committee and the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries' oversight hearing on the Migratory Bird Treaty Act including issues facing agriculture. Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation works in partnership with American Farm Bureau Federation and Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, and we greatly appreciated President Mike McCormick of Mississippi Farm Bureau recognizing challenges his, and our members, are facing from certain migratory bird species.

As a 4th generation rice farmer, I can speak firsthand to the beneficial relationship between agriculture and migratory birds. We are proud of the habitat we provide as farmers for these beautiful and ecologically critical species. My family and I are also avid sportsman and engage in conservation programs to try and conserve and enhance sportsman opportunities for future generations. By and large, agriculture, particularly rice farming, has an outstanding history of mutually beneficial relationships with migratory birds and are a real success story for conservation and agriculture.

Occasionally, however, there can be conflict between mother nature and production agriculture. In terms of migratory birds, we in Louisiana are increasingly seeing direct conflict with a particular species, Black Bellied Whistling Ducks. This species of waterfowl have become a serious financially burdensome and ecologically challenging migratory bird species. Presently their impacts have been felt most directly in Louisiana, where tens of thousands of birds have taken up permanent residence on our Mississippi river corridor at our nation's largest ports. This residency and interaction with the agricultural industry is causing real threats to international bulk shipments of grain.

The export terminals along the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to the mouth of the Gulf of America are essential infrastructure to farmers across two thirds of this nation or greater. Our customers around the world rely on sanitary shipment thresholds that America hangs its hat on as a leader in the world grain trade. However, terminals and farmers in Louisiana are experiencing such high numbers of these whistling ducks, with very little freedom for deterrence or take of these birds, this system is threatened. As large, ocean-going vessels are being filled, thousands of black bellied whistling ducks attempt to eat grain both from the vessels being loaded or unloaded causing direct financial impact to the grain handlers and also potential for multiplication affects should shipments be rejected in world trade settings.

Furthermore, these birds cause direct impact to Louisiana rice farmers all across South Louisiana. Their presence and population continue to press northward. The LSU AgCenter estimates these birds cause roughly \$3M annually to rice farmers, and that number grows each year as these birds migration lessens and their residency increases. Both groups, international grain buying companies and our farmers, share in these financial impacts. It is imperative that population estimates and lack of attention to this issue no longer be an excuse for laughable depredation permit take numbers or expansion of depredation methods. Rice and grain farmers provide millions of acres of waterfowl habitat annually and have for decades had a mutually beneficial relationship with waterfowl.

We appreciate your attention to migratory birds and their rare conflicts with production agriculture. We encourage this committee and all of Congress to find ways to reduce red-tape, implement more freedoms for depredation methods and permitting, and prioritize funding where appropriate to provide proper research into Black Bellied Whistling duck population estimates and other necessary research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard B. Fontenot". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Richard B. Fontenot, President
Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation

CC:

Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Bruce Westerman
Subcommittee Vice-Chair, Mike Ezell