

Statement of Josh Harder
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Legislative Hearing
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2:00 PM

Thank you, Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member McClintock. I appreciate the opportunity to come testify about the threat Nutria pose to my home in California's Central Valley – and the legislation I wrote to stop it.

As you can see, I brought with me a life-size Nutria, commonly referred to as a swamp rat, that we've named Nellie, to illustrate the size of the Nutria and show you what we're up against.

Nutria can grow to up to 40 pounds. Nellie here is more of a mid-sized Nutria. She probably weighed somewhere around 20 pounds. So the largest ones are twice this size. It's tough to see, but she has what the LA Times called "nacho cheese" colored teeth that she uses to eat plants that are native to wetlands and swamps.

And Nellie and her friends really need those big orange teeth – Nutria eat about a quarter of their weight in food every day. So, for a big Nutria, that's ten pounds of plant life every day.

And they are very friendly with one another as it turns out. One female can lead to 200 offspring in just one year. And the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has warned that if we don't take action immediately, there will be 250,000 nutrias in California within five years.

Nellie's family in Louisiana have caused an immense amount of damage over the past 100 years – I am sure my colleague, Mr. Graves, can also attest to the real havoc these swap rats cause And now they're in California. We have to stop the swamp rat invasion before it gets out of hand.

Nutria can destroy crops, including almond trees, as well as irrigation canals. And they can even cause flooding by burrowing into water control systems, threatening our water infrastructure.

They're a threat to our native wildlife and local ecosystems. I've heard the real concerns of inaction from both farmers and environmentalists - this issue unites them in a way few other issues do. To me, that show's this is a common-sense issue we need to get behind.

That's why this investment – and the timeline on this investment – is so important. My bill would simply revive a program that the state of Maryland used to almost entirely eliminate the infestation in the Chesapeake Bay. It uses a variety of strategies to control and eradicate the invaders and ended up saving a ton of money in the long run.

My bill would bring back that program, make California eligible and fund it at a rate of \$7 million. Which is a tiny investment compared to what will be necessary if we wait any longer. Between the time I introduced this bill in June and today, the CDFW has removed over 150 nutria from the wild. Time is of the essence, so I encourage wide bipartisan support for this bill.

I want to thank the cosponsors of this bill, Rep. Garamendi, Costa, Cox, and Lee for joining me in this fight as Nutria are not constrained to a single district.

And I want to thank the Committee for giving me an opportunity to come and discuss my bill. Given the importance of this issue, I look forward to working with you to help this bill get across the finish line. I appreciate your time. Thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, and I yield back.