

**U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Water Oceans, and Wildlife**

**Hearing: Hybrid WOW Legislative Hearing, March 29, 2022 – 2pm EST**

**Written Testimony of Ed Penny, Director of Public Policy of Ducks Unlimited**

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the subcommittee. My name is Ed Penny, and I am the Director of Public Policy for Ducks Unlimited in the Southern Region. I am also a waterfowl and wetland ecologist. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of Ducks Unlimited and thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for the invitation to be here today regarding the Red River National Wildlife Refuge Boundary Modification Act. This bill seeks to modify the existing boundary of the refuge to include a property owned by Ducks Unlimited.

With more than one million members and supporters in the United States, many of whom are sportsmen and women, Ducks Unlimited represents a significant conservation voice for wetland, waterfowl and the associated landscapes that support them. Ducks Unlimited has been North America's leader in wetland conservation for more than 85 years. Our mission is to conserve, restore and manage wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl, including the vast environmental, economic and natural infrastructure benefits these resources provide to all wildlife and people. We work in Canada, Mexico, and every state in the United States. Since 1937, Ducks Unlimited has conserved more than 15 million acres of habitat important to waterfowl, other wildlife, and people.

Many of you are very familiar with Ducks Unlimited and our work across the continent, and we appreciate your continued bipartisan support for the key federal programs important to migratory birds and their habitats. Our members and volunteers give their time and resources to support wetlands and waterfowl, and we are diligent in doing on the ground conservation projects by leveraging these private dollars with public funding to support habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans.

We support this bill because:

- 1) It supports science-based conservation. Specifically, it will support the goals and objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan as outlined by the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV). The LMVJV is a public-private partnership that drives science-based conservation of migratory birds in the region. To be specific, the Joint Venture sets habitat goals for waterfowl by calculating the food value of cropland habitat, forested wetlands, and other wetlands. National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) and other public lands are a major contributor to these goals, and unfortunately, Red River NWR is well below its habitat goals. Therefore, the USFWS is interested in a future acquisition of this property because of its high waterfowl values. If Louisiana is going to continue its well-deserved reputation as the Sportsmen's (and women's) Paradise, then we must work hard to secure high quality habitat for future generations of ducks and waterfowlers.

- 2) It aligns with DU's strongly held principle of voluntary conservation. In December 2020, DU acquired a 3,300-acre property in Red River and Caddo Parishes through a willing seller transaction with a local family. This property was actively managed by the landowners for many years to provide waterfowl habitat, farm-related income, and outdoor recreation opportunities. The landowners are conservationists and wish to see this property benefit the public. It facilitates a public-private partnership for conservation by leveraging private dollars with public resources to conserve key habitat in the Red River valley.
- 3) It will benefit the public by helping US Fish and Wildlife Service to secure more habitat for waterfowl and more places for public recreation. According to the National Waterfowl Hunter Survey conducted by USFWS and state agencies, 25% of hunters point to a lack of places to hunt as a severe problem. This bill will help address this issue by expanding public access by as much as 3,300 acres of public hunting land. Consequently, more public hunting land, resulting in more outdoor recreation, would provide economic benefits to these local communities by affording the public more opportunities to come and enjoy Louisiana's natural resources.
- 4) It will benefit the public not only by securing habitat for public recreation, but also by providing natural infrastructure benefits like improved air and water quality and flood attenuation. A single acre of wetland can store as much as 1.5 million gallons of floodwaters. Wetlands not only help purify surface water but also replenish underlying aquifers. Wetlands also work like giant sponges trapping runoff water in their basins and decrease the speed and volume of water flowing downstream.

Once again, I deeply appreciate the opportunity to provide our perspective on this important legislation. DU looks forward to working with the Committee, and our partners, as this bill moves forward, and we will continue to support the wildlife and millions of people who enjoy the outdoors.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to speak in favor of this bill, and I welcome any questions.