

23 July 2013

Chairman Doc Hastings
House Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Peter DeFazio
House Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Oppose HR 638 and Protect the Refuge System

Dear Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member DeFazio,

The Wildlife Society (TWS) respectfully urges the members of the House Committee on Natural Resources to oppose H.R. 638, the National Wildlife Refuge Review Act of 2013, which would remove Executive Branch authority to create national wildlife refuges.

Founded in 1937, TWS is a non-profit scientific and educational association of nearly 11,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers, dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to represent and serve the professional community of scientists, managers, educators, technicians, planners, and others who work actively to study, manage, and conserve wildlife and habitats worldwide.


For the past 110 years, our national wildlife refuges have been created through acts of the Executive Branch and Congress – nonpartisan actions specifically designed to secure, conserve, and protect some of our nation’s most precious natural resources. H.R. 638, sponsored by Representative John Fleming, erodes that legacy and makes it impossible for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to establish new refuges administratively, even though they must go through a rigorous public process to do so.

The National Wildlife Refuge System has been a critical backbone to species conservation, science, and wildlife research. If the Executive Branch didn’t have the authority to create refuges, America wouldn’t have a National Wildlife Refuge System. Every President since Theodore Roosevelt has contributed to the establishment of more than 90% of all refuges. Furthermore, Congress mandated, with only one dissenting vote, that the Refuge System should be strategically grown in the 1997 Refuge Improvement Act. H.R. 638 goes directly against the intent of Congress in that Act.

Although the Executive Branch has the authority to create a new refuge, only Congress can authorize funding for land acquisition or resource management – essentially holding final oversight power on land acquisition for refuge establishment. Additionally, the FWS must go through a rigorous public engagement process before any refuge is established.

Please oppose H.R. 638. This legislation is not only unnecessary due to already established policies and oversight procedures, but it is highly detrimental to the long-term health and wellbeing of the wildlife refuge system and the critical species, habitats, and resources for which each refuge was established.

Sincerely,



Winifred Kessler, President