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May 16, 2025

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree,

As you consider the Fiscal Year 2026 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, I urge you to consider language prohibiting funding being made available to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) *Land Protection Plan for Expanding Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge*.

This Land Protection Plan (LPP), finalized in April 2024, seeks to expand the size of the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge from 6,400 acres to 700,000 acres, an over 10,000 percent increase of federal land in West Texas. If implemented in its entirety, the refuge would be the fourth largest in the contiguous United States and withdraw a landmass the size of Rhode Island from agricultural production. The USFWS finalized this plan without adequate consultation from the residents living directly within the LPP and the announcement of this plan shocked many West Texans who are now concerned about the future of the place that they call home. As a result, several county governments located within the LPP boundary passed resolutions opposing this expansion.

While the USFWS insists that it is voluntary for residents living within the boundary to either sell their homes or enter conservation easements, the finalized LPP creates an environment where these residents, primarily farmers and ranchers, will be pressured into ceding ownership of their land. Increased federal land acquisition will have a direct impact on local tax revenues, placing a greater burden on the taxpayers who remain to fund essential services in the area. USFWS is required to only help offset a fraction of the lost tax revenues, matching either 25 percent of the net receipts of timber sales and grazing leases on the refuge, or 0.75 percent of the adjusted purchase price of refuge lands.

In addition, there are serious questions about how USFWS would be able to manage a 10,000 percent expansion of federal land in West Texas, given the fact that the National Wildlife Refuge System currently faces a deferred maintenance backlog of \$2.65 billion. The Service has a

history of mismanaging federal lands, and there is no reason to believe that USFWS will be a better steward of West Texas wildlife compared to the farmers and ranchers living on the land who have a vested interest in the environment. The animals used to rationalize the LPP – the sandhill crane, pronghorn, and lesser prairie-chicken – all have thriving or growing populations because of the excellent environmental stewardship of West Texas landowners.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to protect the hard-working men and women of West Texas from this unprecedented and unnecessary federal land expansion by prohibiting funds from being made available to implement this LPP.

Sincerely,



Jodey Arrington
Member of Congress



Ronny L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Wesley Hunt
Member of Congress