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1st District, Maryland

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

COAST GUARD AND
MARITIME TRANSPORTATION
WATER RESOURCES



Congress of the United States House of Representatives

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Statement on invasive species by the Honorable Wayne T. Gilchrest in conjunction with the release of "Silent Invasion" a publication of the National Wildlife Refuge Association

I am pleased once again to join Evan Hirsche and the National Wildlife Refuge Association to express my support for the National Wildlife Refuge System. As Chairman of the House Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans, I am always glad to have an opportunity to stand up for the nation's refuges. Today, in addition to expressing my support for expanding our national network of vital wildlife habitat, I am here to say, we must do a better job controlling invasive species on our refuges.

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, which is located in my district on the eastern shore of Maryland, is home to one of the most notorious invaders in the nation -- nutria. This prolific semi-aquatic rodent may elicit jokes about its funny looks, but the damage done to marsh habitat in Maryland by tens of thousands of nutria is no laughing matter. We have lost more than 7,000 acres of marshland in Blackwater, and thousands more nationwide. Birds, ducks, fish, and other marsh-dependent wildlife are literally eaten out of house and home by nutria, which eat the roots of marsh plants, leaving behind mud and open water where there once was productive marsh. Therefore, I will continue to support the refuge system's program to eradicate this invasive species and hope to enact its reauthorization in the near future.

In addition to my district-specific interests, I have recently introduced legislation to reauthorize, strengthen, and expand the National Invasive Species Act. While this bill does not directly relate to the refuge system, reauthorization of NISA is critical to the ecological integrity of private and public land nationwide. My bill, HR 5396, takes a comprehensive approach to slow and prevent the onslaught of non-native species in all US coastal and inland waters. It would establish a screening process for planned importations of organisms, provide the first national monitoring network to detect new introductions, and fund rapid response efforts. We are drastically underinvesting in research on invasive species, and Representative Vern Ehler's complementary bill, HR 5395, would authorize expanded research on how to prevent, control and eradicate invasive species.

I would also like to offer my continued support for Mr. Rahall's legislation, HR 3558, the Species Protection and Conservation of the Environment Act. I am a cosponsor of this legislation, to eliminate non-native plant and animal species that threaten the nation's public lands.

Thank you, Evan, for your organization's continued support of the nation's refuge system and for highlighting the need to address the problem of invasive species.