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**TESTIMONY**  
**BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIE AND**  
**OCEANS**  
**CONCERNING H.R.767, REFUGE ECOLOGY PROTECTION, ASSISTANCE,**  
**AND IMMEDIATE RESPONSE ACT (REPAIR)**  
**JUNE 21, 2007**

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Ken Visger. I am a citizen-conservationist, a lover of our national wildlife refuges, and a person who has enjoyed the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge for as long as I can remember. I'm here today representing the Friends of the Upper Miss River Refuges and the Friends of Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge. On behalf of these citizen-support groups, and hundreds more like them across the country, thank-you for this opportunity to offer comments on H.R. 767.

The Mississippi River and its refuges I knew in my youth are not the same today. In some ways they are better. The water is cleaner, bald eagles are flourishing, and fishing is at times world-class. But a new threat has arrived which threatens the very biological health of our refuges on the river: invasive species.

These invaders take many forms and create unique havoc with our native species and habitats.

- Zebra mussels smother native mussel beds and plug community water intakes
- Purple loosestrife choke and displace native wetland plants like cattail
- Reed canary grass is taking over vast areas of river floodplain, virtually halting floodplain forest regeneration
- Tiny snails from Europe have teamed up with exotic invasive parasites to infect and kill thousands of waterfowl each spring and fall
- Asian carp species are making their way upriver, competing with ancient natives like paddlefish, and in the case of Silver carp, creating a dangerous situation for boaters since Silvers leap from the water as boats approach. A 15-pound fish hitting a boat operator or passenger going 20 mph can cause serious harm!
- European buckthorn and black locust are marching across refuge uplands, smothering native trees, shrubs, and native prairie

I could go on with examples, but the point is we are literally in a war with invasive species, but our refuges lack the resources to launch and sustain an adequate response. Thus, the REPAIR Act is critical to the health of our national wildlife refuges.

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is a case in point. Established by an act of Congress in 1924, the 240,000-acre refuge encompasses 261 miles of Mississippi River floodplain in a more-or-less continuous stretch through the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois. It is also the most visited refuge in the U.S. with an estimated 3.7 million visits a year.

The refuge recently completed its Comprehensive Conservation Plan, or CCP, a plan required by Congress in the 1997 Refuge Improvement Act.

The CCP has an objective to inventory and reduce invasive plants and animals, and 15 strategies for reaching the objectives. For invasive plants, strategies include hiring temporary technicians to inventory invasive plants and prepare baseline maps, write an invasive species plan, and accelerate control through work with states, volunteers, and other partners. However, funding is not available to jumpstart the strategies and make progress on the objective.

REPAIR could change all that. With the act's focus on grants and partnerships, it would provide the means to make a meaningful difference with invasives on the Upper Miss Refuge, Trempealeau Refuge, and hundreds of other refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas across the country.

As a Friends member and volunteer, I know that H.R. 767 could be an important catalyst to marshal dozens of Friends groups and hundreds of other citizen volunteers to help refuges with this problem. We want to help. Please give us the means to leverage our energy with that of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

I urge your favorable review and recommendation on H.R. 767, and look forward to keeping our refuges healthy and vibrant places for both wildlife and people. I want this for fish and wildlife, but just as much for my children, grandchildren, and generations to come.