

**Statement of  
Ned Farquhar  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Land and Minerals Management  
Department of the Interior  
House Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Public Lands & Environmental Regulation  
H.R. 3006, Cibola National Wildlife Refuge Land Exchange  
March 25, 2014**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 3006, which directs the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to conduct a land exchange involving the acquisition of private land contiguous to the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge (Cibola NWR) in Arizona in exchange for certain Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in Riverside County, California. The Department supports the legislation, but would like to work with the Sponsor and the Committee on a few modifications. We appreciate Congressman Calvert's support of this land exchange which will help contribute to the habitat protection and management objectives at the Cibola NWR.

**Background**

Cibola NWR is located along the floodplain of the lower Colorado River between Arizona and California, and provides important habitat and wintering grounds for migratory birds and other wildlife. River Bottom Farms is the owner of approximately 40 acres adjacent to the Cibola NWR in La Paz County, Arizona. In 2006, River Bottom Farms contacted the BLM in Arizona expressing interest in exchanging lands near the Cibola NWR for specific agricultural lands managed by the BLM in California. The proposed exchange could not be considered under the BLM's administrative authorities, however, because the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) requires Federal and non-Federal lands involved in an exchange to be located within the same state.

The lands owned by River Bottom Farms are currently used for farming and goose hunting, and have high resource value as potential wildlife habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has stated its desire to incorporate lands in this area into the Cibola NWR to further protect and manage migratory bird populations.

The BLM lands selected by River Bottom Farms to be exchanged for the acreage near the Cibola NWR are located in Riverside County, California. The 80-acre parcel has been leased for agricultural use under FLPMA to Schindler Brothers, Inc. since 1983, and was identified for disposal by the Yuma Resource Management Plan (RMP) in 2010. Schindler Brothers, Inc. has expressed a desire to purchase the parcel once their current five-year lease expires on Dec. 30, 2014.

**H.R. 3006**

H.R. 3006 directs the Secretary of the Interior to convey approximately 80 acres of BLM-managed land in Riverside County, California, to River Bottom Farms, subject to valid existing rights. In exchange, River Bottom Farms is to convey to the Secretary of the Interior two parcels totaling approximately 40 acres adjacent to Cibola NWR in Arizona to the United States.

Under the bill, the lands acquired by the Department of the Interior from River Bottom Farms would become part of the Cibola NWR and be administered by the FWS in accordance with the laws and regulations applicable to the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Department supports the acquisition of these lands as it would contribute to the Cibola NWR's habitat protection and management objectives. The lands incorporated into the Cibola NWR will be included in a non-hunting area under a cooperative farming agreement, which will increase suitable habitat acreage for migratory birds. Management of the acquired parcels is expected to require minimal operations and maintenance expenditures. We would like the opportunity to work with the Sponsor and the Committee on an amendment to adjust the legislative boundaries of the Cibola NWR to specifically include these parcels.

Under H.R. 3006, the values of the Federal and non-Federal lands to be exchanged would be equalized by payment to the Secretary or to River Bottom Farms, as appropriate, following appraisal under the Federal Uniform Appraisal Standards. We would like to work with the Committee on a number of minor and technical amendments, including consistency with FLPMA, equalization of values, and the time necessary to complete the exchange. Additionally we recommend language to ensure that the exchange is voluntary on the part of the private party. As written, the bill does not specify which party is responsible for the costs of the disposal and acquisition. Typically the costs associated with exchanges such as these are borne equally between the Federal government and the private party.

Finally, we feel it is important to recognize the impact of this legislation on Schindler Brothers Inc., who for the past 30 years has farmed the 80 acres in Riverside County identified for conveyance to River Bottom Farms under H.R. 3006. They also have expressed a desire to acquire the property.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department's views on H.R. 3006. We look forward to working with the Sponsor and the Committee to resolve these issues.