

IN RE: U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE
PUBLIC MEETING FOR HABITAT MANAGEMENT PLAN & ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT FOR FELSENTHAL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

TRANSCRIPT OF COMMENTS
FROM
CROSSETT PUBLIC MEETING

TAKEN NOVEMBER 12, 2015, AT 6:00 P.M.

Conway Court Reporting

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Conway, Arkansas 72033

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C A P T I O N

TRANSCRIPT OF COMMENTS, taken from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service public meeting on the 12th day of November, 2015, at 6:00 p.m., at the First Baptist Church Multi-Ministry Center, 703 Pine Street, Crossett, Arkansas.

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P R O C E E D I N G S

JOHN BURSOM: I would just like to talk about the ATV trails. I hope we don't close any more than we've already closed, because the elderly population, like me and Frank, hunt down here a lot. It reduces our opportunity to do it, and it concentrates all the hunters in one spot, and it could get to be a safety issue.

MICHAEL STROEH: Fair comment. Thank you.

FRANK DOLEN: While we are on closing trails, y'all built a new trail at the back line and after one year, you closed it. It was only open one year. If you close Pine Island ATV trails -- I'm going on 78 years old. It looks like the trails y'all are closing benefit the senior citizens. The senior citizens pay taxes, too. We own a little bit, everybody in the United States, of that reserve down there, just a little. I don't like the way the senior citizens are being treated down there. Thank you.

ANDY CLINE: Well, I actually have a bachelor's of science in forestry. I have just a couple of questions about Alternative C plan, specifically the water management policies. It states on the alternative that December 15th, we would raise the

1 water level a tenth a day until 68 feet is reached.
2 However, if that's to promote hunting success, it
3 wouldn't be at 68 feet until 40 days, because it
4 would take ten days to get a foot. It would be at 64
5 feet already. I don't know if that benefits hunter's
6 success by the time it reaches the normal 68 feet of
7 elevation. Also -- that's the main point. If it's
8 going to promote hunting success, why not leave the
9 water level -- raise it earlier as opposed to waiting
10 later. On the data I saw on the presentation
11 presented, the green tree reservoir would be raised
12 in September. The two comparison charts show
13 September until August. I mean, that's not when
14 green tree reservoirs -- I don't know if that chart
15 was actually a valid comparison of how we would
16 manage this refuge system. I would just keep that in
17 mind in future consideration for this management
18 plan.

19 MICHAEL STROEH: Thank you. And you're right.
20 That graph was not Felsenthal in particular. It was
21 used to show what natural flooding should look like.
22 Natural flood pulses versus what the GTR is. That's
23 the only thing we can take away from that. It's not
24 related to Felsenthal. It was just to kind of show
25 that comparison.

1 ANDY CLINE: That actually brought the point
2 of -- we are having a 2.6% mortality rate of the
3 hardwood population in the bottomland species. I
4 actually spent a lot of time reading the wonderful
5 260-something-page habitat management plan. I kind
6 of skipped over the red-cockaded woodpecker
7 management. At 65 feet of water, the main thing that
8 we're trying to accomplish is there is only a foot of
9 water between the full water table of that pool on
10 that bottomland hardwood system. We are having
11 increased mortality rates, which is most commonly in
12 the form of blow downs and uprooted trees, because
13 they are not able to establish valid root systems
14 within that ecological system that was built in place
15 in '85 when you built and raised the water table. I
16 think that, you know, at least at 64 feet, you would
17 have two feet of development of the root systems. If
18 you look down the river to the upper Ouachita
19 National Wildlife Refuge Mollicy Unit, you are seeing
20 natural succession occur. It is a very, very slow
21 process in the flooding of the system. I don't think
22 a significant change -- I would advocate toward
23 lowering the water to 64 feet, barring any navigation
24 traffic as a result of increasing the forest health
25 in that bottomland hardwood system, and then raising

1 it for duck hunters.

2 TINA CHOUINARD: All right. Thank you.

3 GEORGE KLINE: I am, too, a forester. I manage
4 7,000 acres of land. I manage a lot of red-cockaded
5 woodpeckers and all that kind of stuff. I understand
6 the red-cockaded woodpecker issue. I also understand
7 the impact of the nature conservancy properties being
8 added to the overall population on the west. We know
9 that if a colony develops or a cluster develops,
10 y'all are going to do everything you can to maintain
11 it, regardless of what this plan says, because that's
12 the law. We understand that 13 to 15 colonies in
13 proposal B was probably the correct number given for
14 habitat, which was a correction of a jump to
15 conclusion, based on what research was done, which
16 was probably done further south. I agree with the
17 reduction of clusters or the increase of acreage into
18 the clusters of the red-cockaded woodpecker. The
19 other thing is, like my son said, we are probably, a
20 lot of people, concerned with water management in the
21 green tree. As a guy that's been managing hardwood
22 bottoms for 30 years, cutting, and growing them, and
23 done everything just like y'all have, the problem, in
24 my opinion and experience, is the decline in the
25 hardwood where we didn't kill it from the flood. I

1 understand that U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service wouldn't
2 have wanted our treatment hardwood management the way
3 we've done it, because of the navigational channel
4 with the pressure of the lake and all that. We have
5 to do the best we can with that. I understand that.
6 If you put a boat on that river and you sat on that
7 river bank with 65 feet of water and you just took a
8 knife and sliced through that river bank to where you
9 hit the watershed in the back, from that level down,
10 there is no manageable timber, because it's changed
11 and we've made mud flaps and all that kinds of stuff.
12 Where the decline occurs is somewhere in there
13 between 65, 66, or 67 feet where you start picking up
14 willow oak and nuttalls. Probably the most mortality
15 I see out there -- there are some standing and dying
16 trees, but there is a lot of them, because of the
17 situation below 65 feet where they are getting
18 shallow rooted and those trees blow over. That's
19 what it is and that's what happens. Lowering the
20 water pool, in my opinion, would help dry that soil
21 out. It is not a high-water problem. That river
22 bottom developed in a high-water problem. It always
23 has had flooding, anywhere from 75 feet and then the
24 river channel would go down to 50-something feet
25 every year. It's not a high-water problem. It's a

1 low-water problem.

2 MICHAEL STROEH: Thank you.

3 LARRY THREET: They put water in some of those
4 plots just to see if they were having the effects
5 that the gentleman just spoke about. You can go and
6 look at that data, and you can make your own
7 determinations as to what the water level was or is
8 in the summertime.

9 MICHAEL STROEH: Yeah. I knew there was water
10 wells out there.

11 LARRY THREET: I just wanted to make a point
12 that that data is available for you. You can take a
13 look at it.

14 MICHAEL STROEH: Thank you.

15 BILL BURCHFIELD: It's a valid point and what he
16 said is true. The ground water below has affected
17 it. I won't argue that. I don't even know, to the
18 full extent, how much it has affected it. I would
19 say what Mr. Threet said is also true. There is data
20 there to look into. I would also say that wind throw
21 is also an issue. I wouldn't say it's the number one
22 cause of mortality. There are a lot of GTRs that
23 have issues. A lot of those didn't have the increase
24 of water levels prior to being flooded. So, I guess,
25 the general trend that I see in this research and

1 others is that tree mortality and regeneration are
2 issues with most GTRs and most of those probably
3 haven't had the water level change that we have.

4 BILLY TAUNTON: I would like to address the plan
5 for the trails to be shut down. The way I'm looking
6 at it is, if you shut them down, some of these guys
7 right here that's in maintenance, they are probably
8 going to lose their job. Twenty-eight miles, I
9 think --

10 TINA CHOUINARD: Eighteen.

11 BILLY TAUNTON: Eighteen. Looking at it through
12 a perspective like Frank and myself and some of the
13 older guys, I just feel like that there is more to
14 this thing than shutting the trails down. Looking at
15 the perspective of raising and lowering the water,
16 the way I'm looking at it, it's a budget issue. I
17 just feel like three or four years ago, the
18 government didn't have enough money. I was out West
19 this summer and I seen something about a refuge and
20 all of them pull money together. I just -- I think
21 we just need to leave trails alone. The main thing
22 of -- you told me that this here was a local -- was
23 opposed by the locals?

24 TINA CHOUINARD: Yes.

25 BILLY TAUNTON: It's just hard for me to look at

1 something that was proposed by some folks to do away
2 with their own guys. Do you understand where I'm
3 coming from? So I think we need to leave these
4 trails alone and everybody can kind of scatter out
5 and not get shot. It's a big safety issue.

6 MICHAEL STROEH: Thank you.

7 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: If you could, tell us what
8 that executive order was that you referenced.

9 TINA CHOUINARD: What are the executive orders
10 that we referenced? That was the question.

11 MICHAEL STROEH: I think President Nixon and
12 President Carter both issued executive orders on off
13 road vehicle use. One of the clauses in there says
14 that if there is any negative impacts to public land,
15 wildlife disturbance, they are to be closed. That's
16 what it is. It's two executive orders. We also have
17 policies dealing with off road vehicles. That's what
18 we're doing. We are evaluating the trails.

19 BOB BRIDGES: As somebody said, we are still
20 looking for that gold from those golden years. Kudos
21 to Fish & Wildlife Service and Tina and Michael for
22 having public input. I want to echo concern about
23 closing the ATV trails. I simply would ask that you
24 reconsider, in particular, with Alternative B. As
25 you keep the water down, walking areas are going to

1 be even more difficult to access in the extent that
2 you remove the ATV trails. Secondly, I have a major
3 concern on the control of non-exotic and other pest
4 animals. The following statement was made referring
5 to control of feral hogs. It states to include
6 trapping and shooting by service employees. I have
7 no problem with that, but please let the public help
8 you out. I would like to know the specific
9 biological rationale for including the public in the
10 harvesting of feral hogs. I would like a
11 clarification in writing about that. Please
12 reconsider allowing us to help you to do that.

13 TINA CHOUINARD: Thank you. Any other questions
14 or comments?

15 RICHARD FULLER: What Mr. Bridges said about the
16 presentation, it talked about nuisance animals and
17 hogs being one of those. I would like for, when I
18 finish, for you to comment on this. I don't have all
19 the information, but I heard some statements made
20 that said that the refuge was following the state
21 regulations and something to do with trying to
22 control the nuisance hogs. I know that's a big
23 problem on the refuge. The other thing was about the
24 ATV trail closures. I don't know what can be done,
25 but I know that in the past the refuge has made some

1 attempts to widen the trails. You've got a lot of
2 the public using the trails but then a Caterpillar
3 comes down through there and you can drive a truck
4 down most of the trails. I don't know what impact
5 that has on the habitat. Maybe there is an
6 alternative to that. I know that safety is one
7 concern, dead falls, and those kind of things. It is
8 a public concern with closing the ATV trails. Maybe
9 in the future, in some way, you can minimize
10 Caterpillar use and, you know, the effects that it
11 may have over the ATV use. If you would, comment a
12 little bit about it so that I can understand what the
13 refuge is following as far as the state with the
14 nuisance animal.

15 MICHAEL STROEH: Thank you for your comments.
16 While the feral hogs are an invasive species, the
17 state decided to take a strong -- a hard look at
18 feral hogs. There is no information out there that
19 tells how to control the hog population. We are
20 consistent with the state and their regulations.

21 CASEY ODEN: I feel like that if they close
22 Shallow Lake and make it a part of the sanctuary, it
23 will put more people on this side and it's going to
24 be way more dangerous. It's already dangerous as it
25 is. I just feel like I don't think that will be a

1 good idea to close that and make it a sanctuary. I
2 just think it would be a safety issue. That's all
3 I've got to say.

4 TINA CHOUINARD: I appreciate it. Thank you
5 very much.

6 FRANK McMAHAN: We was -- Bob, this is probably
7 directed at you. We was promised a boat ramp at
8 McIntyre Bay back in the early beginning and I just
9 wonder what happened to that. Do you remember that,
10 Duke? They was going to have a campsite there.

11 MICHAEL STROEH: I know nothing about the boat
12 ramp. That is the first I've heard of it.

13 FRANK McMAHAN: The next thing, y'all have got
14 the worst nuisance there is around here with those
15 black bears. You can't have a feeder up and down the
16 side of that refuge that they don't tear it up. Now,
17 I know that y'all don't want to hear it, but them
18 feeders are expensive. I don't know what to do with
19 them. They will get it and just carry it with them.

20 MICHAEL STROEH: Thank you.

21 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Let me elaborate on that boat
22 ramp thing that Frank was talking about. If Bob
23 remembers when the Ouachita and the Black River
24 navigation deal met, you know, I thought that -- if I
25 remember right, the state has to build a ramp on the

1 river. Am I not understanding that right?

2 MICHAEL STROEH: I think so, but I would have
3 to --

4 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Anyway, back in '77 when they
5 initiated the deal to get it bought and everything,
6 they had a proposal for a boat ramp at Pine Island,
7 Shallow Lake, Eagle Lake, and at McIntyre Bay. It
8 has not never materialized. That's one of the
9 reasons why I think that these trails would be -- if
10 it had been, we could have used the trails off the
11 low end of Eagle Island to go into the river, and
12 everybody could have been spread out.

13 TINA CHOUINARD: Thank you.

14 KENNETH ROPER: I just had a comment on the ATV
15 trails. I had a gentleman over here in Crossett a
16 couple of years ago that passed away. The last
17 turkey he got to kill was because he was able to get
18 access to the bird on the refuge. You are going to
19 eliminate some of the last treasures of people's
20 lives, because they are not going to have access to
21 get to where they want to go.

22 TINA CHOUINARD: Thank you.

23 CRAIG PENNINGTON: I am completely against the
24 closing of the trails. Like he said, the -- some of
25 the trails closing is going to eliminate people being

1 able to scatter out, duck hunting, squirrel hunting,
2 coon hunting, it don't matter. You are going to have
3 people in boats and people on four-wheeler trails
4 right on the river and that's the only place you're
5 going to be. Y'all have closed several trails over
6 the last 25 years. You've put in brand new trails
7 and went back a couple years and shut them back down.
8 I have a question is the main thing. Other than the
9 executive orders that you mentioned, what is the real
10 reason that we're considering closing these trails?

11 MICHAEL STROEH: We looked at distance from a
12 public road and the rivers. We looked at that as one
13 factor. If you look at the map, you will see that in
14 some of the most remote and difficult areas, we still
15 allowed those ATVs and we didn't close that. Other
16 factors was hydrology, basically some that are right
17 on top of the river banks, and that is not the best
18 to have ATVs right on the river bank. We looked at
19 that.

20 CRAIG PENNINGTON: The ATV trails that you're
21 closing, unless I looked at it wrong, tell me which
22 ATV trails we're closing that's on the river. You're
23 closing the ones on the Ashley County side on Pine
24 Island, but they are not right on the river. That's
25 really my biggest concern.

1 MICHAEL STROEH: Okay. And that's your comment.
2 Please submit that. We will get all those factors.
3 Some of that ATV trail along Pine Island is right
4 around a public road.

5 CRAIG PENNINGTON: Yes, sir. That's irrelevant.
6 That part didn't matter to anybody. It's where it
7 turns off.

8 MICHAEL STROEH: Those are -- it was just in
9 that proximity there. If there is any habitat damage
10 that runs south of there, you know, basically, the
11 water runs down the trail now. Years of use down
12 there. That was factored. The normal hydrology of
13 the system has now been impacted and altered by the
14 trail. Those are the factors we looked at.

15 CRAIG PENNINGTON: If I didn't use the trails
16 down there at all and my friends didn't use them, my
17 dad is disabled and he can't walk, and it's going to
18 limit his hunting tremendously. This is something
19 that I brought up at the last three meetings that
20 we've had like this. The state WMAs, every one of
21 them you go on, has got a handicap trail on it, at
22 least one. This refuge has never had a handicap
23 trail, and we've got huge parts of the refuge that
24 unless you're in a lease or you have permission from
25 that lease to cross and get on the refuge, you can't

1 get to it. We've got lots of places that are very,
2 very inaccessible, and we've never tried to do
3 anything to correct that.

4 MICHAEL STROEH: Fair comment. I strongly
5 encourage you to put those in writing to us.

6 JOHN BURSOM: You were addressing the four-
7 wheeler trails down the riverbank. I agree. We had
8 trails that went through the heart of the bottomland
9 there and wasn't on the riverbank and they closed
10 those and left those open down the riverbank. Where
11 you've got them on the riverbank, it puts everybody
12 in one spot. You can open those up in the middle and
13 it won't be damaging the water near as much as the
14 ones on the river.

15 MICHAEL STROEH: Fair comment.

16 TINA CHOUINARD: Thank you.

17 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Can I address something
18 pertaining to the forest down here? You know, you
19 said you -- pertaining to comments on the water level
20 and bringing it back down and addressing the hardwood
21 bottoms, I listened to two policy men here that's
22 supposed to know all the aspects of knowing how to
23 grow trees. You know, the first thing is that you've
24 got to have oxygen to grow that tree. Since you go
25 up river and down to a ten-foot channel, are you

1 going to replenish any bottomland on this ten-foot
2 channel and go back and reseed it and bring it back?
3 Under the 68 feet, you don't measure for 30 days or
4 45 days -- duck hunters are listening to everything
5 that's being said right here and right now. They
6 feel like they are getting left out. I do, too.
7 What I'm saying is that you're not going to replenish
8 the timber, because -- I mean, you might on some of
9 the upper land timber. The timber will not come
10 back. Now, the button willow bushes and things like
11 that will come back in these areas. Like I say, I
12 was raised in that river bottom and I know a pretty
13 good bunch about it. I think my opinion is to just
14 leave the refuge alone. Leave it just like it is.
15 Leave the ATV trails alone, leave Shallow Lake alone,
16 and look at it for about ten years and then come back
17 out to the public with it. That's the way I think.

18 TINA CHOUINARD: All right. Thanks.

19 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: In Alternative A, it says
20 there is no flooding for two to three years. What is
21 your plan on that?

22 MICHAEL STROEH: There was -- my predecessor
23 proposed a water management plan and this is where it
24 gets kind of confusing. We had to have a dry year.
25 We were starting out with two consecutive dry years.

1 The whole thing was dry. There was no winter
2 flooding. There were several scenarios of bringing
3 it up 68 and I think one had it at 69. It was a
4 variable plan where we would flood periodically. It
5 was somewhat confusing because we were waiting for
6 that dry year. Once we got that dry year, we started
7 the cycle variable plan flooding and it would not be
8 the same necessarily. One year you could flood 68
9 and one year was 79. You start in November and then
10 the next time it was in December. It was going to be
11 difficult for everyone and that's where some of the
12 frustration lies. Everyone has to understand what is
13 going to happen for the next year and that season.
14 That's what it was. He brought it out to the public
15 four or five years ago.

16 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I know it was. I just want to
17 know what it's going to be after the two or three
18 years. That's my question.

19 MICHAEL STROEH: I will have to go back to the
20 exact -- what he made out. I think it was 69.

21 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: So you can go back to that
22 plan possibly?

23 MICHAEL STROEH: Yes.

24 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: But you don't know?

25 MICHAEL STROEH: Right. We are going through

1 this process now.

2 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: How can I decide when you're
3 not telling me what you're going to do in two to
4 three years when we've got a 15-year plan?

5 MICHAEL STROEH: Because it varies from year to
6 year.

7 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I just want to know what the
8 plan is after the two to three years.

9 MICHAEL STROEH: I would have to go back and
10 look. I don't have it memorized, sir.

11 ANDY CLINE: I have a comment about both of your
12 information. Thankfully, I had an excellent
13 professor in college that actually worked for the
14 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for several years.
15 Y'all might know him. His name is James Dixon. He
16 is an excellent guy. He is really knowledgeable. He
17 took us on tours of several green tree reservoirs.
18 You want to alternate when you bring the water off
19 from year to year if you bring water off on certain
20 areas. The thing about the Ouachita River system is
21 it's not that easy. We could have an excellent water
22 management plan for the past five years, which we've
23 never brought the water up. It's really hard with a
24 flooding river system, especially the Saline and the
25 Ouachita River, to really manage that water

1 management plan. To touch on the hardwood
2 regeneration, it's very difficult to plant a hardwood
3 regeneration. It requires specific light levels. I
4 think the most important thing is just managing the
5 stand health. I think the water flow at 64 feet, you
6 are going to have to deal with natural succession.
7 The largest hardwood producer on the Mississippi
8 River, their management plan is to cut and let it
9 regenerate. Natural succession is basically the
10 oldest, sensible management for hardwood
11 regeneration. That's unfortunately a factor of why
12 hardwood stands across the south are suffering. We
13 probably will never see the impact of this plan. It
14 will probably be our kids, but hopefully we can at
15 least sustain the ecological conditions that are
16 currently there.

17 TINA CHOUINARD: Thank you.

18 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: The other two forums, were the
19 comments and the public concerns similar?

20 MICHAEL STROEH: Yes. Obviously, the water
21 level and sanctuary is number issue. We knew, going
22 into this, that that would be the biggest issue. It
23 was going to be the main one. Yes, we knew. You are
24 on point. Everyone has the same concerns.

25 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: One quick comment. I had

1 mentioned that I manage a lot of land and a lot of it
2 is in the Mississippi Delta. No question about it,
3 if you rut those roads up and you keep doing that,
4 and there is water that runs across it, it's going to
5 create a problem. One of the things I do with my
6 land is -- I know it's a budget deal, but we try to
7 abandon old trails when they get bad, move them over,
8 and where we can, it's a long process, but we cap
9 them. I know it's expensive, but at least it does
10 eliminate an awful lot of that. We don't just say,
11 This is trail A. We will turn the water off, and
12 we'll put a culvert in where we have to. There are
13 some ways to maintain or move a trail over slightly
14 and maybe eliminate some of those problems in the
15 future. It is expensive and the guys that work out
16 there are going to have to be diligent and sometimes
17 you have to tell people not to use a trail. There
18 are alternatives to just closing them. You can move
19 them. Most of the trails were where someone painted
20 on a tree and said that this is where the trail is
21 going to be. Years of use does create a problem, but
22 it can be addressed in other ways than just closing
23 them.

24 MICHAEL STROEH: Thank you.

25 JACK ALLEN: This little note here. I think we

1 might say thank you for them providing the
2 opportunity for us to voice our opinion. I am
3 thankful that the meeting has gone as tranquil and
4 reasonable as it has. I'm 81 and I will tell you
5 this, I'm very, very passionate about this refuge.
6 If not for this refuge, I wouldn't have had a place
7 to hunt and fish. When it first went in, we had
8 doubts about it, but it didn't take us long to
9 realize that without that refuge, you're not going to
10 hunt and fish like you do. I am a little bit
11 confused about this, because I've got the real deal
12 out in the truck that is about this. It was at the
13 meeting that I attended and I am sure it is because I
14 can't understand the calculations on it. That is
15 something I will take up with Mike. The timber in
16 2001, there were 5,612 stems. In 2006, there were
17 13,053 stems. That's an increase from 2001 to 2006.
18 Now, the rest of them were negative. I couldn't
19 understand. I realize that some trees are more prone
20 to damage than others. I know I have -- who will
21 take my suggestions? I don't know anything, and I
22 say that sincerely. I know I've been down there a
23 lot and I try to observe. I know I spoke to the
24 previous manager. I don't think I've talked to you,
25 Mike. I think that bean field should go into the

1 sanctuary. At one time, it was a sanctuary. When
2 that is flooded, that bean field will house your
3 ducks and it will be a safe place. We must have
4 these sanctuaries. In the evenings I'm down there at
5 4:30 or 5:00. But I am telling you that them ducks
6 know where those sanctuaries are. We need to leave
7 more sanctuaries. We need to protect our ducks. In
8 my opinion, that's the only reason that we continue
9 to have ducks. Before we had sanctuaries, we would
10 shoot them out in about three days and it might be a
11 month before they get back. We've got the ducks down
12 there. I believe that the majority of the men here,
13 I am going to say 97% of them go down there with no
14 intention to break the law or do anything wrong and
15 sometimes someone is trying to look for an
16 opportunity to do something wrong. Sometimes we kill
17 a hen too many but don't mean to -- well, I'm taking
18 up too much time. My opinion is nothing but opinion.
19 My opinion on this sanctuary is that it looks real
20 good. We did have 9,000 acres in a sanctuary and now
21 we have only got 6,000. There is no water and no
22 hunting. That's not a very good swap in my opinion.
23 We are looking for quality hunting. We can't have a
24 quality hunt if you shut that down, in my opinion.
25 They can't have a quality hunt with all the pressure

1 that is going to be put on this other side of the
2 river. I forgot who else made that comment. My
3 passion about this place -- my son, who is back
4 there, he is 54 years old. He was about 12 years old
5 and it was in the spring. His buddies went to
6 California to take a vacation and the other one in
7 Florida somewhere. He told me about it and I said,
8 If you had your choice to go to California on
9 vacation or Florida on vacation, where would you go?
10 He said, Mud Lake, Dad. This is my final comment.
11 We've had a lot of different managers and had a lot
12 of philosophies and a lot of changes. We've tried
13 for 30 years to accomplish this. Apparently -- I
14 haven't asked you what the status of the timber now
15 compared to 30 years ago, but I think I know that
16 answer. It's not as good. So I guess my question is
17 this, we've tried it for 30 years and let's be
18 receptive for some other solution. Thank you for
19 your time.

20 MICHAEL STROEH: Thank you.

21 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I would like to ask you a
22 question about water management. The water moves
23 through faster now than ever before. It could come
24 up to 67 in three days and have it back down to 65.
25 Now, I understand that's not you. But I also

1 understand that is not necessarily mimicking the
2 natural flooding either. In other words, they will
3 close the gates and hold the spillway at 65 and the
4 river gets to 66, and they will open the spillway and
5 then blow the water out as fast as they can. Is it a
6 possibility to say something to the Corps of
7 Engineers to set the flood gates this year -- set the
8 spillway at 65 and leave the flood gates closed and
9 let that water come out slower?

10 MICHAEL STROEH: I would have to explore that
11 option.

12 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I mean, when it starts up and
13 it stops raining two days later, it blows right out
14 of there. In 30 years, that's never been the case.
15 Are they sitting there saying, We've got 65 and one,
16 we've got to blow that tenth out of there? Are they
17 doing that?

18 MICHAEL STROEH: Not that I'm aware of. I
19 haven't specifically discussed those types of things
20 with them. Thank you to everyone for coming. I
21 strongly encourage you to put your comments in
22 writing to us, whether it is on that card or an
23 email, drop it by the office, please. We do take all
24 the comments seriously. I strongly encourage that.

25 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Y'all are saying that all you

1 are dealing with is the habitat management?

2 MICHAEL STROEH: That's all this is. This is
3 the habitat management plan.

4 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: The plan I read had a lot more
5 in it aside from just habitat management, like budget
6 things and stuff like that.

7 MICHAEL STROEH: Well, yeah, managing habitat
8 costs money and it's got some budget stuff in there.

9 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Are we not supposed to mention
10 it?

11 MICHAEL STROEH: You are welcome to mention it.
12 If you have a problem with the budget numbers in the
13 plan, that's fine. We just -- that's just what
14 we -- there is always cost in habitat management.

15 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I thought I saw in there where
16 you requested an additional \$325,000 annually; is
17 that correct?

18 MICHAEL STROEH: Yeah. But that is pie in the
19 sky. You always -- you can request that. But will
20 it become a reality? No, not anytime in the near
21 future. I am just trying to look down the road.

22 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: If budget issues has been such
23 a big concern, has there been any conversation -- I
24 don't know what the Fish & Wildlife Service could do
25 about it. The U.S. Corps of Engineers could make it

1 to where every time you launch your boat, you pay a
2 three dollar fee. I know that the ATV trails are on
3 all these men and women's mind. Is there any talk
4 about maybe doing a tax service where you park to
5 unload your vehicle to help pay for the trails that
6 they will be using? I am sure that a three dollar
7 fee is a lot cheaper than buying your own lease and
8 everything like that to maintain it, so we could have
9 access to it for future generations.

10 MICHAEL STROEH: I will just briefly address
11 that. We have the rec fee program, which we do
12 charge for that. There are a lot of refuges nation
13 wide that are going to \$12 or \$15 or \$20 just to come
14 onto the refuge. It doesn't matter if you are bird
15 watching or if you are fishing or hunting, it's \$20.
16 You are shoveling it out. I have avoided that.
17 Unless there is an administrative burden on the
18 staff -- I understand what you're saying. I have
19 avoided those kind of issues where I can.

20 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Thank you.

21 MICHAEL STROEH: I mean, I try to keep it to
22 where -- unless there is an administrative burden to
23 us, I try not to tax. That is my personal opinion
24 and professional opinion. I am not trying to do that
25 right now.

1 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I just want to say that I
2 support Alternative B, with the exception of the
3 reduction of ATV trails. Other than that, that one
4 looks okay. The other thing, I am opposed to the hog
5 regulations on the refuge. I have 288 signatures in
6 Ashley County that are opposed to that regulation. I
7 have access to 2,500 other signatures throughout the
8 state.

9 MICHAEL STROEH: Thank you.

10 TINA CHOUINARD: Thank you again for coming out.
11 If you can, fill out those comment cards.

12 (WHEREUPON, the proceedings were concluded in
13 the matter at 7:54 p.m.)

14 (WITNESS EXCUSED)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF ARKANSAS)

) ss

COUNTY OF VAN BUREN)

I, NICOLE HARTWICK, Certified Court Reporter #739, do hereby certify that the facts stated by me in the caption on the foregoing proceedings are true; and that the foregoing proceedings were reported verbatim through the use of the voice-writing method and thereafter transcribed by me or under my direct supervision to the best of my ability, taken at the time and place set out on the caption hereto.

I FURTHER CERTIFY, that I am not a relative or employee of any attorney or employed by the parties hereto, nor financially interested or otherwise, in the outcome of this action, and that I have no contract with the parties, attorneys, or persons with an interest in the action that affects or has a substantial tendency to affect impartiality, that requires me to relinquish control of an original deposition transcript or copies of the transcript before it is certified and delivered to the custodial attorney, or that requires me to provide any service not made available to all parties to the action.

WITNESS MY HAND AND SEAL this 30th day of November, 2015.

NICOLE HARTWICK, CCR

Certified Court Reporter #739