

**Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge
Transcripts of Formal Public Hearing on Draft CCP/EIS
Keene, NH; November 5, 2015**

[*Transcript of Comments Recorded from R09_0018.MP3*]
[*A total of 39 speakers provided comments*]

Speaker # 1, David Deen

[*9:45 start*]

Good evening. My name is David Deen. I am an Upper Valley River Steward with the Connecticut River Watershed Council. The Watershed Council is a non-profit membership organization. We've been around since 1952, and we have an interest in protecting the environmental values that directly and indirectly support State, regional, and local economies and our quality of life throughout the four-state watershed, which just happens to be the same area as the Conte refuge.

CWRC supports the Conte refuge as a concept and as an on-the-ground reality. Over the years since its founding, CWRC has seen the positive impacts of the refuge and those impacts on the river, the watershed, and the species that depend on the river. We support many of the elements of the draft CCP. We do have a few comments, though, for your consideration.

Quite honestly, the Watershed Council does not agree with the choice of alternative C, which is the preferred choice for the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Watershed Council prefers alternative B as the direction for the Conte refuge for the next 15 years, and there are several reasons for our choice of alternative B.

Towns' experience with Federal ownership is that the refuge has in the past, and would likely in the future, not modify its PILOT (*editor's note: PILT?*) payments upward as land values change upward in a community. Of course the refuge is not unusual within the Federal government in this area. The result is that significant lands under Federal ownership usually result in the loss of tax revenue at the state and local level. Our suggestion is that the refuge should seek to implement its habitat and conservation goals through the acquisition of conservation easements or facilitation of third-party acquisition of easements, not through fee-simple purchases. This would lower cash-outlays for the refuge and increase the partner base for the refuge in terms of the organizations at the local level that they would work with.

One comment: Even though it's a new approach to conservation in the refuge, the addition of Quonotuck –I hope I'm pronouncing that right – the mainstem area is in alternative B, C, and D and it is an important inclusion in all three alternatives. This should not change and should remain in each alternative as focus areas.

The Watershed Council will be submitting written comments that will expand on these and add a few points to our suggestions to the refuge. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to

you about the CCP. It is an important document and it has 15 years. So what we get and what we develop we're going to live with for a long time. Thank you.

[13:07 end]

Speaker #2, declined to speak

Speaker #3, Dennis McKenney

[13:23 start]

My name is Dennis McKenney. I live in Bennington, New Hampshire. I am a consulting forester and a land surveyor in New Hampshire. I have been so for over 40 years or more, and I have had occasion to see some of the refuge in my work in northern New Hampshire.

I see you that you selected alternative C. My preferred alternative would have none of the above. I see no particular reason for increased Federal acquisition of land in the region. My experience with Federal land ownership has been that it is more often managed with benign neglect than assertive management, and this results in a significant economic detriment to the region – the lack of management does – and I think there are ample local opportunities that land owners can avail themselves of for land protection without the involvement of Fish and Wildlife or other Federal agencies. Thank you.

[14:43 end]

Speaker #4, Mark Abear

[14:48 start]

Good evening. My name is Mark Abear. I'm from Meredith.

The Silvio O. Conte project is a long fought and seldom won battle. There's no Federal interest sufficient for the establishment of Federal control of state, community, municipal, or private land within the area specified as the Silvio O. Conte project borders. The Silvio O. Conte project serves no reasonable public purpose. At the time of considerable budgetary strains, this is poorly timed and ill conceived.

The Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service and other agencies control vast swaths of land, as much as 80 percent of the land area of some states. As a result, many local residents have become frustrated with Federal policies governing preservation, recreation, and natural resource development. I question the Federal government's commitment preventing national disasters like forest fires. When states do manage to recapture Federal land, it tends to be smaller parcels the Federal government cuts loose for a specific purpose such as building a road or an airport. Occasionally the District of Columbia will sell a parcel that is surrounded by private property but serves no other public purpose. In 2015, 11 western states considered measures calling for the transfer of Federal lands to state control. True, only a handful of bills passed and none resulted in the transfer of land. New Hampshire and her citizens are well advised to oppose this proposed Federal land grab of up to 30 percent of the land area of the state. Other states and citizens including the plan area are similarly well advised to oppose this Federal land grab.

The long odds and a reluctance to spend money on land management have spurred some states to try a different approach. Instead of taking on the Federal government in a futile fight for ownership, New Hampshire needs to arm counties with monies and expertise to help them convince Federal officials to hew more closely to the interests of the residents. The land office - Once taken off the tax rolls, will remain off the tax rolls in perpetuity. New Hampshire's property taxes fund education and town operations. The federalization of nearly 30 percent of the total land area will cause the remaining property tax base to carry the entire burden. This will, over time, come to mean that property tax rates throughout the state may rise as much as 50 percent. It will bring a whole new meaning to "donor towns."

State lawmakers need to approve a million dollar grant for counties that will influence Federal land use decisions. County leaders should then use the money to hire consultants to evaluate data, provide scientific research, or to attend agency coordination meetings. The law authorizing the grants could also require the state agencies to provide additional expertise and assistance to counties when they ask for it.

There is a consistency provision in the Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976 governing BLM oversight of public land, which requires management that conforms - at least generally - to what local leaders want. There is no indication in the proposed agency action with respect to Silvio O. Conte that this project does conform with what local leadership wants. This is a Federally-driven, top-down proposal.

The Federal Government and its agencies need to be stopped. This is nothing if not a land grab. It is a taking by the government from the people and no evidence has been produced that this action is asked for. Thank you.

[19:06 end]

Speaker #5, Ann Cartwright

[19:13 start]

Ann Cartwright. My husband, Joseph, and I are here because so far we are the first landowners who received a postcard from you concerning this. I've written a response, and I will read from it and then I have a couple of other things to say.

My husband and I own and manage a tree farm within the Alstead Focus Area for the expansion of the Silvio O. Conte Wildlife Refuge. We do not choose or support any of your plans for expansion of Silvio O. Conte Wildlife Refuge nor do we accept the premise that the Federal Government, through the different agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is the best custodian of property or natural resources for the benefit of people, land, water, or wildlife. Although there are possibilities for problems in any situation, private property has more accountability for, and ability to make or change, decisions as immediate situations arise. Corporations can and need to be held accountable for their decisions. If you contend that the agencies of the U.S. Federal Government are different and would never cause such problems for people and the environment, here are multiple articles presented of incidences where both people and the environment over a large area are harmed by policy decisions implemented by the U.S. Federal Government.

I'll start with the EPA is upset of about 3 million gallon Animas River spill. I'll give a quote from the article by John Hinderaker. "I don't doubt that the EPA's bureaucrats are upset but will they actually bear responsibility for the spill as a private company would?" Yesterday, we contrasted the Animas River disaster with the far smaller Elk River, West Virginia, discharge that happened last year. In that case, employees of the responsible company, Freedom Industries, were criminally prosecuted and did jail time. Does anyone at the EPA or the EPA's contractor that directly caused the Animas River spill have to fear any such penalty? I doubt it. That's that example.

The next is from Newsweek, "What BP doesn't want you to know about the 2010 Gulf Spill" by Mark Hertzgaard. "BP even rebuffed a direct request for the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Lisa Jackson, who wrote BP a letter on May 19 asking the company to deploy a less toxic dispersant in the cleanup. Jackson could only ask BP; she could not legally require it. Why? Because use of Corexit has been authorized before under the Federal Oil Pollution Act, which is highly toxic to both people and wildlife.

Next – More on the Gulf Coast Oil Spill. "Does the Federal Government share responsibility?" by Jack Spencer. "There are also questions surrounding a National Environmental Policy Act exemption that BP attained. Major Federal actions including the sale of off-shore drilling leases generally require a detailed Environmental Impact analysis as part of the NEPA process before they are permitted. Unfortunately, the NEPA has evolved into an onerous and costly process that shows progress on critical public and private activities. Complying with NEPA requirements can take years to fulfill, and the process is subject to litigation. This has led to NEPA exemptions for projected that are deemed to pose little environmental risk, which BP was granted.

Corexit, an oil spill solution that is worse than the problem – that's what they used in the Gulf – granted by the Federal Government. Soon after the Deepwater blowout, BP snatched up one-third of the world's supply of dispersants, namely Corexit EC9500 and Corexit EC9527, and Corexit EC9527 is more toxic. Its main component, 2-butyloxyethanol, has been identified as one of the agents that caused liver, kidney, lung, nervous system, and blood disorders among cleanup workers, cleanup crews, in the Alaska Exxon Valdez Spill.

According to media reports, nearly all of the individuals...

[time to speak expired]

[24:55 end]

Speaker #6, Emily McAdoo

[25:06 start]

Hi, I'm Emily McAdoo. I'm President of the Putney Mountain Association, and I'm speaking on behalf of the Putney Mountain Association. I'm representing – We are a non-profit organization that owns and maintains around 550 acres in the Putney Mountain area and Windmill Hill ridgeline, some of which abuts the Putney Mountain Unit of the Silvio O. Conte reserve.

I'm representing the Putney Mountain Association in support of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife CCP. I am speaking for myself and 13 other board members and a membership of over 700.

We endorse alternative C of the CCP, as this alternative offers increased protection of wildlife habitat and threatened and endangered species through the combination of active management and increased land acquisition. It will also increase public access to refuge lands and rivers and extend working partnerships with neighboring organizations. We also enthusiastically endorse the section of the CCP which would open the refuge trails to the public in the Putney Mountain Unit of Vermont in collaboration with Putney Mountain Association. Trails in the reserve already link to existing Putney Mountain trails. Opening them to the public would anchor this trail network as the southern portion of the Windmill Hill Nature Reserve, a 25-mile trail system stretching from Putney to Grafton, Vermont. With Putney Mountain Association's recent acquisition which abuts the reserve, there are now 500 contiguous acres of conserved land. Opening the Conte portion is idea for nature observation, citizen science projects, wildlife photography, and educational walks. Opening the trails to the public enhances the area for light recreational use – hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. The plan brings increased environmental education and interpretive opportunities and resources through self-guided materials and public programs. Putney Mountain Association will work in partnership with the refuge to offer interpretive programs and to support refuge initiatives. Thank you.

[27:31 end]

Speaker #7, Pat Shields

[27:39 start]

Hi, I'm Pat Shields from Westminster, Vermont.

I want to support the preferred alternative, option C, of the Conte National Wildlife Refuge. I would like to speak to the issue of land acquisition, and I'll make this short and fairly simple.

I was a seasonal park ranger for a number of years with the National Park Service, and without a doubt the visitors that always, always valued our parks more than any other visitors were from Europe. The reason they valued this is because they lacked the expanses of conserved wild land, and thus they lacked the wildlife and the variety of plants that depended on that conserved land.

Once land is developed, it's lost. It's not going to come back into a wild, conserved state. I do agree that there are many, many private landowners who are taking very good care and are wonderful stewards of their property. However, as land gets passed on through families and goes from parents to a number of children to even a greater number of grandchildren, frequently what happens is that land becomes broken, separated into parcels and sold off. And therefore, I think that we need to support Conte in the effort to preserve lands. We're leaving our grandkids enough of a mess, and I think this we have an opportunity here to leave them some pearls too. I think the Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge is one of those pearls. Thank you.

[29:39 end]

Speaker #8, declined to speak

Speaker #9, Norman Sims

[29:50 start]

Hi, my name is Norman Sims. I live in Winchester. I'm speaking as a volunteer for the Appalachian Mountain Club, and I've been asked to make some comments about the expansion of the Conte refuge.

We think this is a wonderful and long overdue action. The Conte refuge has contributed to the conservation of the natural habitat along the Connecticut River and its watershed. We believe we need more of such actions in the watershed of this national river.

Conte has been an amazing research organization and has protected vulnerable habitats for years. The Connecticut River Watershed needs more protected areas on its tributaries, which is what this expansion in the Ashuelot Watershed will achieve. The Sprague Brook Conservation Area that is proposed and would protect a good deal of delicate habitat contains swamps, wetlands, rare and endangered species. This is an area that has remarkable qualities that would not be protected under other programs. In fact, I support expanding the Conte conservation area under option C beyond Richmond and to include Winchester, New Hampshire. We think the expanded Conte refuge would contribute to the economic development of the tourism industry in this corner of New Hampshire.

I'm also a resident and landowner in Winchester, where the Conte refuge may acquire some property or easements. I'd like to make two personal comments about that. First, it would be beneficial for the Town of Winchester to protect Mirey Brook, which feeds the aquifer from which Winchester obtains its drinking water. Mirey Brook flows out of the Sprague Brook area and flows to a very high transmissivity aquifer in Winchester. What happens in the Brook impacts our drinking water. Second, personally I believe that some of the opposition comments to the expansion of the refuge are anti-landowner arguments. The folks from Conte have emphasized that they will only buy property and easements only from willing sellers. From a landowner perspective, such transactions also need willing buyers. A lot of the Sprague Brook Conservation Area has limited timber appeal and lots of issues because of the wetlands and endangered species. Having a willing buyer, such as the Conte refuge, would have increased benefits for willing landowners. I hope that the Conte will consider these arguments as being opposed to an open marketplace for land. Thank you very much.

[32:59 end]

Speaker #10, Gus Ruth

[33:03 start]

Silvio O. Conte was in Winchester with a proposal several years ago. It seems that their efforts to expand into the watershed in Richmond and Winchester was probably diverted or the funding wasn't there in the end, but we again support it. We supported it then. I'm a member of the Winchester Conservation Commission also on the Planning Board. I was a Selectman at the time that Silvio O. Conte was making a presentation in Winchester and Richmond. We gave full support at that time, and we give you full support now. We prefer alternate C with a little input

from D, so we get you into Winchester and Richmond. Like I said, we fully support it and we did forward our support letters previously. Thank you.

[34:18 end]

Speaker #11, Jasen Stock

[34:34 start]

Good evening. My name is Jasen Stock. I'm the executive director of the New Hampshire Timberlands Owners Association. We're a statewide landowner organization, founded in 1911. We have about 1,300 members across the state – landowners, loggers, forest products industry. We promote multiple use. We also promote land conservation.

When we looked at the proposal, our preferred option would be option D, none of the above. We look at this in the context of past management we've seen on Silvio O. Conte, on the Umbagog, and even on the White Mountain National Forest where we see, in fact, very little forest management activities going. In fact on the White Mountain National Forest, currently what we're seeing there is a loss of early succession habitat to the point where biologists are getting concerned about certain species and certain species loss. We look at this proposal, and we say there are better ways. We look at working forest conservation easements, such as the forest legacy program, or working with other local land trust as the solution. We don't think Federal ownership or expansion of the Silvio O. Conte refuge area is appropriate.

We also look at this in the economics context. We did a study – Actually Plymouth State University did a study to quantify the economic activity that comes from active forest management and how much money circulates in the economy. When we ran the numbers on the proposed expansion – alternatives A through D and even the expansion in alternative E –, we saw an economic loss of activity from \$73,000 a year to \$3 million a year from land being taken out of the active forest management base. We couple this with the fact that, particularly in the Mascoma area and the Ashuelot area, we're looking at in many cases very productive timberland. The Mascoma area in particular – this is not a primeval swamp area or an untouched wetland – this area – talking to the land managers that have managed that literally for generations – we're looking at upland hardwood stands that have been managed for at least three generations, 95 percent of it is upland soils, it's not – unlike Pondicherry which has a large wetland complex – when we look at upland areas like the Mascoma, we're looking at areas that are productive timberland that this proposal would literally take out of the forest land base.

I gave you letters from several local area sawmills. These are five mills in southern and central New Hampshire. They employ over 200 people. They have payrolls from just these five mills of over \$5.5 million. Those are just the mills, not to mention the loggers, the foresters that are currently working these lands. Those are jobs that would be lost. This proposal is of great concern to us.

The other piece of this is we heard about the credibility. I gave you two photographs of signs in your package. On October 14, a member of ours took a picture of a sign in Canaan – Silvio O. Conte Wildlife Refuge boundary. This weekend, in Dorchester, another Wildlife Refuge sign went up. Now this is before the hearings even began. You folks are putting signs up. You're

already cutting deals with landowners. You're already doing deals with landowners before you even have public input. How are we supposed to feel the impact of our comments if it appears that this is already a foregone conclusion? Let alone having made up your mind, you're already out there doing real estate transactions and putting signs up on the landscape. We think this is outrageous. We've been talking to our Congressional delegation urging them reign you folks in.

Again, the testimony in St. Johnsbury – We had members up there. Again, I think you're hearing some of it again tonight. There's a lack of credibility - the fact that you're putting signs up and already doing real estate deals, the past history of management, and the fact that there's other ways to protect land. Keep it in production. Keep it as contiguous parcels. These are things that you folks should consider. This is not a good deal. We oppose this plan. We would say alternative A, or alternative A with zero expansion. Thank you.

[39:47 end]

Speaker #12, Gordon Kemp

[39:54 start]

Hi, I'm Gordon. I live in Alstead.

I just want to voice my opposition. I don't want to repeat. Pretty much all my opposition reasons have been stated already. I think it's a waste. I think all you guys should go get jobs in the private sector, and that's about it.

[40:12 end]

Speaker #13, Annette Spaulding

[40:16 start]

Hi, my name is Annette Spaulding. I'm a resident of Rockingham, Vermont. I'm basically here myself. I've been a scuba diver for 30 years, and I've been serving on the Underwater Rescue Team for over 30 years. The Connecticut River was our territory.

The great thing is, I was involved originally back with all the meetings and this wonderful publication that was put out. I am in such support of this Conte act. I scuba dived in the river 30 years ago when we had dyes running out of buildings, the bottom was so sludgy and horrible. Every time we had to search for a missing person, we could see about two inches in front of us. Over all the years of search and rescue – which I still serve on the Underwater Rescue Team – it is so wonderful – we actually have up to 20 foot visibility scuba diving in the river now - not just that – over the years – especially over the last 15 years, I've been able to find the most unbelievable things. We have this beautiful river, the heritage river, 114 in the United States, we need to protect this river. It is so full of history. Just in the last 15 years, I've discovered an 1812 bridge between Putney and Westmoreland - very historic bridge, called the “Elephant Bridge” – too long to go into right now. I've discovered incredible historic artifacts - Native American artifacts. Just a few months ago, I found a Native American artifact in the West River, where it comes into the Connecticut River down in Brattleboro. None of this would have ever been possible without the clarity of the water. To kayak down that river – and I've been kayaking for 28 years now – it's amazing and it just still needs to continue to be protected.

I am so thankful for the Conte act in the past. I am not a public speaker *per se*, but I just really would like to – I’ve seen the long-term purpose become successful– I just want to say that I really don’t completely agree with alternative C. I agree basically with alternative B, and I would like to second David Deen’s comments since I do not have enough time to go into that without going over my five minutes.

Thank you so much for the wonderful work all the volunteers have done and all the other watershed people here tonight. It’s a group effort to keep this river clean. Thank you.

[43:06 end]

Speaker #14, John Caveney

[43:24 start]

My name is John Caveney. I live in Chesterfield, New Hampshire. I am the Vice President and Woodlands Manager at Cersosimo Lumber Company, with its corporate office in Brattleboro, Vermont. We have two sawmills in Brattleboro. We have a sawmill in Rumney, New Hampshire. Our “woodbasket” – if you will – which has supported our mills, extends from Coös County in New Hampshire to Long Island Sound, from southern Maine west to the Adirondacks.

I would just say quickly that I have some understanding of government and how it works. Our company has been the single largest purchaser of Forest Service timber on the White Mountain National Forest in the last 15 years. I have a great understanding of land set-asides, seeing as we own two sawmills – one within the blue line in the Adirondack park and one perched on the edge of the Adirondack park.

My comment here tonight is - I can’t support any of what’s being represented here tonight, especially article C, and the reason for that is, truthfully, it’s economic. I stand here speaking for myself, but I also speak for 300 employees in our company that are on the payroll in the form of direct employees in the sawmill business, people in the trucking business. I would have to say that the outside contribution to that – from the mom and pop outside logging contractors, the truckers, the foresters, the landowners who are within our so-called “woodbasket,” if you will – I think could potentially be harmed by this. I know that it’s important to our company, as it is to other companies which were mentioned earlier when Jason Stock spoke about the importance of this woodbasket. I would also say that in my 40 plus years of experience that most of these landowners have been good stewards. With all due respect, they don’t need the help of the Federal government. I would have to point out that, in my long career and I’m proud to say that I’m a New Hampshire native and caught my first trout in Coös County a long time ago, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has not demonstrated any management activity at all that’s really measureable. To speak about wanting to protect or promote or to enhance habitats for woodcock – which is mentioned as a part of this – or black duck or any of the other species that exist right now on the private lands that are being managed and think that the government could do better, I think not. I think about what has happened in northern Vermont when the Federal government showed up, and then gates showed up, and people were denied access to lands that they had historically had access to.

I would also want to speak quickly to the idea – that to my understanding, having tried to read everything that was online about the proposal that’s on the table at this point in time – with respect to the process – it’s my understanding, and I would stand corrected – that the potential for an eminent domain proceeding is not off the table. Eminent domain proceedings are intimidating. I would only say that the company that I work for was intimidated on two different occasions in my career, and land was given up for two parcels that are not even being managed now. So again, thank you for the opportunity. Appreciate it very much.

[47:55 end]

Speaker #15, Judy Aron

[48:02 start]

Good evening. My name is Judy Aron. I’m from Acworth, New Hampshire.

I am here tonight to express my extreme distaste and disapproval of this plan. This is appalling, absolutely appalling, that we would have the Federal government wanting to take control over a waterway from the mouth all the way up to Canada and all the land – what is it, like 31, 216 acres – where they will control that totally to tell us where we can go, when we can go, how we can use it, what we can do, what we can’t do. That is appalling. Aside from the fact that here we have this huge land grab, and you’re saying in the plan and in hearings how “we’re not going to use eminent domain,” yet it’s not off the table. Eminent domain has not been eliminated from this program at all.

What kind of Americans have we become where we would allow the Federal government to do a program like this? Does anyone really understand where this program, what the inception, where this program came from? If you look on the internet, Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge is IUCN category 4, habitat species management area. Do you know what IUCN is? IUCN is International Union for Conservation of Nature. So where did that come from? That’s an international organization and that’s basically United Nations brainchild. In 1991, the IUCN together with the United Nations World Wildlife Federation published “Caring for the Earth,” the successor to the “World Conservation Strategy.” They lay the foundations for the Convention of Biological Diversity, a new global treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity developed by the United Nations with support from IUCN, the framework convention on climate change and agenda 21 – and yes there is an agenda 21, which is now agenda 2130. Now the term “sustainable development” was born in the pages of “Our Common Future,” the official report of the 1987 United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development authored by Gro Harlem Brundtland, Vice President of the World Socialist Party.

This land grab where the Federal government is going to be taking land away from private ownership is socialist in nature. I cannot abide by it, and as Americans we should not abide by it.

I think this program – You are all here because you have a legal obligation to have a hearing and this program is going to go through whether we like it or not. But what we need to do is send a message to Washington to defund this – absolutely defund it, not have a dime to use to buy any land from anybody. I’m sorry, but this is un-American, this project. Thank you.

[51:30 end]

Speaker #16, Jan McClure

[51:36 start]

Good evening. My name is Jan McClure. I live in Concord. Tonight, I'm here representing The New Hampshire Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, where I work.

The Nature Conservancy and New Hampshire appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Silvio O. Conte Comprehensive Conservation Plan and EIS. We concur with the Service and strongly endorse alternative C as the preferred alternative. The Conte refuge is both an environmental and economic success story for New Hampshire. The Connecticut River and its tributaries are ribbons of irreplaceable habitat that wind through many communities and shelter countless species of the watershed. Protecting these areas for future generations will have a lasting impact on the character and quality of our natural environment and the strengths of our tourist economy.

This draft CCP is consistent with the mission, vision, and purpose of the refuge and the four refuge goals outlined of habitat conservation, education, recreation, and support of partnerships. The Conte refuge plays an important role in the quality of life of New Hampshire's Connecticut River Valley, providing unique opportunities for people to enjoy the aesthetic beauty and recreational opportunities of the region along with protecting vital wildlife habitat in strategic locations. All refuges are open to the public, and the recreational opportunities they provide for people have the ripple effect of benefitting local economies in areas where they are located. Wildlife enthusiasts, hikers, paddlers, hunters, and anglers visit refuges and spend money locally. Refuges are destinations here in New Hampshire for outdoorsmen, hunters, fishermen, and bird enthusiasts from distant locations. I recall being at Pondicherry on a fall day, much like today, several years ago. I ran into a couple there who had travelled all the way from Delaware to see that beautiful spot. This will happen in other refuges as they are developed in the watershed.

The Conservancy has successfully partnered with the Service in habitat conservation in New Hampshire at Pondicherry and Blueberry Swamp. We have worked over the years with dozens of landowners, providing them the opportunity to conserve their land for future generations. Working together, we have conserved over 2,000 acres of critical wildlife habitat at Pondicherry and Blueberry Swamp. These areas are important stopping points for migrating birds and vital linkages for wildlife movement. The universally accessible trails at Pondicherry enable everyone to enjoy its remarkable beauty and diversity.

We look forward to working in new areas to protect critical wildlife habitat and provide unique opportunities for the public to enjoy these resources and benefit their local economies. We applaud the additions of the Mascoma River, Sprauge Brook, and the Ashuelot River focus and partnership areas in this draft plan. These additions create important ecological and functional connections for wildlife and plants and contain critical habitat for migrating birds, deer, bear, and other wildlife. By providing space and habitat for wildlife, we are providing important resources for people and for our New Hampshire economy.

We understand and appreciate that this plan has been many years in development. Planning for the future conservation of the entire four-state Connecticut River watershed is an enormous undertaking. The Service has done an exceptional job at representing the biological diversity of the region in this plan, as well as emphasizing the vital role partnerships play in the work of conservation.

Thank you for the work you do in partnering with local organizations like The Nature Conservancy, communities, and landowners interested in conserving their land for the benefit of wildlife, the present and future residents of our state, and the many people from around the world who visit these unique areas. Thank you.

[56:02 end]

Speaker #17, declined to speak

Speaker #18, Andy Fisk

[56:16 start]

Andy Fisk. I'm also with the Connecticut River Watershed Council. I'm speaking to respond or clarify to some previous comments.

At the Connecticut River Watershed Council, we support the refuge as others have noted because it provides an option to private landowners. A lot of our work by the Connecticut River Watershed Council is to bring resources and expertise to private landowners who are interested in stewardship and protecting their investment in their individual private property. We do that by bringing a lot of Federal programs from the NRCS and other Federal entities, and we find the private landowners needed that type of assistance in the form of money as well as technical expertise in order to protect their investment in their property. So in the same way, we see that the refuge and the willing seller provision is another option for landowners. This is not a Federal land grab. The Comprehensive Conservation Plan asserts very clearly that it will be enacted by willing sellers. For people who are concerned about eminent domain not being taken off the table, it can't be in a planning document. That's a statutory provision. So for concern on that, the Services has stated very clearly in the plan, this will happen by willing sellers only. And that in fact the extensive tract record of the Refuge System as a whole. When eminent domain has been used in the very, very few instances, it has been done at the request of the landowner who has sought to do it in order to clear title or dissolve discrepancies in price, and they have asked for that provision to be used. This is not a Federal land grab.

I can certainly appreciate - this is a very long document, and members of the public may have first heard about this very recently, this is a lot to digest but I want to point to the record in the document that shows that since 2006, the Fish and Wildlife Service has been working with communities, organizations, individuals, and State government in order to listen. This plan has been fed up through the state agencies who are using their publicly-derived plans that set priorities. This has gone through a tremendous amount of public process, and it is locally originated.

The Connecticut River Watershed Council - we're also a member of an organization that is called the Friends of Conte. It has 60 plus organizations that work throughout the entire watershed with the Fish and Wildlife Service. This is a bottom-up, grassroots initiative with the Fish and Wildlife Service being incredibly responsive to local initiative and local desires. That's a very unique aspect of this refuge. It is a fish and wildlife refuge. Its purposes are for conservation, recreation, and education. This refuge program is incredibly unique across the country because it works with so many partners. This is not one Federal agency acting of its own volition and wielding power arbitrarily. This is a grassroots initiative that has come from the bottom up. I can appreciate there's a lot here, but just to reflect for those here tonight, there has been since 2006 a tremendous amount of work to put this document together.

I guess the only point I would reference – the New Hampshire Timber Owners Association – the concern about the refuge posting signs in the middle of the process. It's important to note that there is an existing refuge, there is an existing plan, and there is existing authority to purchase land from willing sellers. So those signs that were produced, that's not the agency running around this process. The refuge exists, and there are land deals happening already with willing sellers. I can assure you that is not an attempt to end-run this process. They're working within the existing plan and their existing authorities. Thank you.

[1:00:17 end]

Speaker #19, Stewart Bevin

[1:00:25 start]

My name is Stewart Bevin. I own a consulting forestry business, and I work in New Hampshire and Vermont, based out of Claremont.

I looked over the plan, and I can't agree with any of the options. Really where we're at in this country, the government's broke, and it's kind of a joke that we're sitting here spending millions plus to acquire more land in an area, where despite what people say about grassroots, it's not a grassroots initiative. I live and work with private landowners every day, and I've never heard one of them ever talk at all about wanting to see the Silvio O. Conte expand, and they're the ones that you would approach to buy the land from.

I also have quite a bit of experience working in northern New Hampshire in a variety of capacities at periods in my life. I've seen the opposition, particularly in the town Errol. I'll be blunt – they hate you guys. The locals do not like the Silvio O. Conte refuge. There's no grassroots. There's nobody in those towns, outside of people working for you directly, that like it, so to sit here and say it's grassroots – It's not.

That said, the other thing I'd add is that there's really no imminent threat. We talk about the clean water, yeah we are blessed to have some really clean water here in the Connecticut River Valley but a lot of it is due to legislation that was passed long before the Silvio O. Conte ever arrived and a lot of it also had to do with private landowners doing what's right in conjunction with better education brought by such groups as the NRCS and state agencies. It had nothing to do with the Feds outside of the Clean Water Act – I will give you some credit where some

credit's due but it had nothing to do with the Silvio O. Conte. Really, I don't see any imminent threat for you guys to keep buying more land to preserve the water quality.

We also – beating a dead horse here – there's no local control. When you guys own land, it doesn't matter what the locals want and what the local people think is best. It's always going to be what your Director in Washington wants. I'll be also honest being a hunter, an avid grouse hunter, the regulations that you guys have on some of your refuges are stupid – They're just stupid regulations. They're an idea that comes up with somebody as an intern working in Washington, they think it's a great idea 'cause they're just out of college, they've got great ideas about the world, and then suddenly that becomes a law. We don't need that. In the State of New Hampshire, the amount of fluorescent coloring on your body – the State doesn't even require it. The Feds require it, but they don't just require a vest. You have to like literally have all these – that's just one example. The other big push is the anti-lead shot. You know, I know it might raise eyebrows around here, but the reality is lead poisoning in an upland game environment, it's a non-issue, but that said...

The other big factor is I've worked in the industry for 18 years in many capacities from buying pulp wood to buying saw logs. The fiber costs in the Northeast are the highest of any region outside of probably the Pacific Northwest. The difference is our wood is not as valuable. The knolls are struggling – I don't care what anyone says. In every piece of land that goes out of private ownership into Federal ownership is land that's lost for good for management, and that drives up the fiber costs. The reality is that's all words. There are people employed in these businesses, as gentlemen like John Caveney talked about, the company he works for - these are good jobs, high-paying jobs at a time in our economy where there's not a lot of that and to keep putting nails in that coffin that's exactly what the Conte will do, so I'm definitely not a fan as you can tell.

[1:04:46 end]

Speaker #20, declined to speak

Speaker #21, Steve Lindsey

[1:04:58 start]

Hello, I'm Steve Lindsey – Keene, New Hampshire – former State Rep, two terms – live over on Center Street.

I'd like to voice my support for what you're doing and what David Dean talked about, option B. I grew up in this town, 55 years, when I was a teenager, we were promised 600 shad would be coming up the river someday and we never saw them but I'd like to see you continue your efforts to continue developing our natural resources. I'd like to see those 600 fish come up some day.

A second thing I'd like to say is I'd like to see the Schell Memorial Bridge saved. It's a nice access to the Connecticut River, it's going to be knocked down but it gives the public access to natural resources – you probably have very little to do with that, but it is still – historic preservation dovetails with natural resources.

Now I'm speaking from a guy that lives in the City of Keene, on the lake bottom, and we depend on our wells and the sandy bottom. We need to protect our water resources because, without our water, our City is in trouble. I'm supporting you with this project to protect our water resources.

There's been a lot of criticism tonight. One guy talked about a woodbasket. I was involved with some friends in Nelson, New Hampshire. A guy talked about being intimidated out of harvesting some timber. The company that went to Green Gate wanted to take timber off that land and develop it, forever changing the nature of Nelson and Hancock, New Hampshire. There was a grassroots project, and you do have grassroots supporters, I'm one of 'em, that defeated that proposal and that land went into the Harris Center for conservation land and it's an award-winning educational and beautiful place to visit this day. I canoe up there, I walk the woods, and I'm grateful for having had a second chance at Green Gate and Nelson, New Hampshire.

I say to you godspeed with your effort. You do have supporters, and there are people that are thinking beyond the quarterly earnings report. Thank you.

[1:07:10 end]

Speaker # 22, Patricia Rodrigues

[1:07:19 start]

Hi, my name is Patricia Rodrigues. I live in Westmorland, New Hampshire.

I think the most important thing here for everyone to understand is you have to look at the big picture and, whereas this one lady is railing about the international perspective, everything is related on this earth we have here. The rest of the world wants the Connecticut River to become what it should be – a cleaned up river – because not very long ago, it was a very filthy river. This refuge has only been in existence since 1995, I believe, and so they're just developing their strategy. Nothing is perfect. Their plans aren't necessarily perfect, and there's going to be problems with whatever plan you do come up with. However, protecting natural areas needs to be done because, once they're gone, they are gone. Even responsible wood management is still getting rid of the natural processes.

In terms of money and economics, it is not the rest of the world's fault that New Hampshire has the most backward tax system you can imagine - it relies only on property taxes. That is not the rest of the region or the world's problem.

There are lots of statistics out there that say that the natural resources of New Hampshire is what actually brings money in, brings tourists in, and if you let private people – the few irresponsible ones that ruin it for the rest of the people who do a wonderful job – well then, it defeats a lot of purpose. I, unfortunately, in the middle of a situation where private individuals are ruining resources very close to the Connecticut River. It actually happens to be in this wildlife habitat corridor that goes from the Connecticut River to the upper inlands where the Ashuelot proposed area is. One thing that I've been saying to a lot of groups and individuals lately is that it is the only corridor that connects the Connecticut River to the inner uplands for 70 miles along the Connecticut River. You can't find anything else like it between Lyme, New Hampshire, and

Pisgah State Park. That's probably part of what makes the Ashuelot area as special as it is because it does have this connection with the river.

Like I said, nothing is perfect. Government has already given up on the salmon restoration plan. I don't know how many of you know that, but that was one of the original hopes of Silvio O. Conte. But that's been given up on. It has to have something to do with that the private individuals were not able to sustain the big picture well enough for the salmon to be brought back. It's not just a matter of fish ladders. It's a matter of what's been going on along the river.

[comments she made about her preparedness were not included]

Another one of these imperfections – Yes, we have The Nature Conservancy here – However right now in my area of Walpole-Westmoreland, the State government is trying to shove down the throat of the people that live there, a regional trash facility that could be as big as Keene's, and this is a tiny, little town. It's bringing trash from other areas. Unfortunately, the lawyer had his backing the company that wants to do this actually is the Trustee for the Conservancy. So there's a little oxymoron going on there. I don't understand.

We really do need to protect the Connecticut River. Once it's gone, it's gone and you can't bring it back so err on the side of caution and go for the plan that they want to do. Later on, perhaps, it could be backed down on, but if you let it go now, it is gone forever.

[1:12:13 end]

Speaker #23, Chris Rietmann

[1:12:19 start]

Hi, my name is Chris Reitmann. I live at 788 Alstead Center Rd., Alstead, New Hampshire. I am a Selectman for the Town of Alstead.

I support conservation. I own 15 beautiful acres. I oppose all options.

Sometimes when you don't have a lot prepared, it's just easier to quote RSA so I'm going to do that:

“Title 9, Acquisition of Lands by United States; Federal Aid.

Chapter 121: Acquisition of lands by the United States for the purpose of public conservation, forestry, recreation, experimentation, or demonstration.

Section 121:6 - Limitations on Right to Acquire. – Lands which may be acquired under this chapter shall be such as by reason of quality, location, or condition are better adapted to public conservation, forestry, recreation, experimental, and demonstration purposes than for continued private ownership and development. Such acquisition shall be limited in total within the state to 2 percent of the total land area of the state, and shall be further limited in each town or city to an amount of land, the assessed valuation which on April 1 of the preceding year was 5 percent of the total assessed valuation on such date of all the real estate in such town or city. The provisions of this chapter shall not limit the authority of the United States to acquire lands for the White Mountain National Forest within the boundaries established by proclamation of the president of the United States, dated

October 26, 1929; and the limitations as to area and valuation contained in this section shall not apply to acquisitions within the boundaries of the existing White Mountain National Forest Purchase Unit, or any new national forest purchase units that may be recommended by the land use board and approved by the governor and council; nor shall any such acquisitions be included in computing such limitations.”

You might have heard me use the number of 5 percent, 5 percent of any town – that’s what the RSA reads. I’d like to give you some percentages. I live in the Town of Alstead. Proposal C of the Silvio O. Conte CCP proposes to acquire 25 percent of the Town of Alstead. Do we have anybody here from Gilsum? Nobody from Gilsum. Gilsum: 52 percent of the Town of Gilsum. Is that more than 5 percent? I’m going to go with Marlow at 32 percent. Surry at 37 percent. Columbia at 12 percent. Richmond at 14 percent. Canaan at 13 percent. Dorchester at 26 percent. Hanover at 4 percent. Lyme at 25 percent. Carol at 9 percent of their town. Jefferson at 15 percent. Whitefield at 12 percent. So, I’m just talking about an RSA, a New Hampshire State Law.

Is – I saw Nancy earlier. I’m trying to remember the gentleman’s name. French? Is there a Mr. French here? That’s you. I contacted Nancy because I wanted to invite Fish and Wildlife into conversations with the New Hampshire Attorney General. We thought it would be good to bring them in early on in these conversations. You’ve never returned my emails. You were copied on an email from Nancy on September 24. I know if I have an issue, I can always – [*Hearing Officer interrupted, “Sir, just keep it to the CCP. You don’t need to...”*] *Mr. Reitman said, This is absolutely regarding the CPP. I expect a return when I ask for an email.*

We can serve locally, and we do so locally. I saw volunteers from the Coldwater River Local Advisory Board. We do that on our own. We don’t need the Federal government to do so.

I think I would say in closing, there’s been a lot of talk about a lot of different subjects – about eminent domain, it remains on the table and Fish and Wildlife always opposes any change to that law. Two New Hampshire Congressmen and Bernie Sanders proposed removing eminent domain from the options for Silvio O. Conte years ago. You guys opposed it. I will just say that I oppose this. I think everyone should oppose this, and if for no other grounds, it’s illegal under New Hampshire State Law. Thank you.

[1:17:26 end]

Speaker #24, Robbo Holleran

[1:17:37 start]

My name is Robbo Holleran. I’m a consulting forester from Chester, Vermont. I manage lands in Vermont, New Hampshire, a little bit into Massachusetts and New York. I manage about 50,000 acres of land, and we represent the landowners. I’m also the President of the Vermont Forestry Foundation. I’m speaking on behalf of myself tonight. I don’t have real prepared comments, but I guess I’ve got some good notes to work off of.

I also travelled extensively in the West, where there’s a predominance of public and Federal ownership. I would just like to see less of that here. One of the things that gives the Upper

Connecticut River Valley its fairly active forest products industry and good management that we have is because we have a minimum of public land, so I don't support any additional acquisition.

It was mentioned earlier that once land is developed, it's lost. I want to point out that Vermont and New Hampshire were about 75 percent cleared for farmland 150 years ago. Now they're about 75 percent forest. We've all seen old homesteads and even factories, mill sites that are all just grown up to trees with stone walls and stone foundations that you find out there.

There's been mention of that the Silvio O. Conte is going to protect the wetlands and the water quality and the wildlife habitat – all of those things are protected by state law on both sides of the river right now. Rare and endangered species, wildlife habitats, water quality are all protected.

The loss of revenue to towns, with the payment in lieu of taxes which is always way short of what the private revenue would be, is a very important consideration. As was mentioned earlier, the government's broke. Why are we talking about spending money to buy land that you can't afford to manage and hire staff to not manage it?

Also want to point out that I am a sportsman and a fisherman. Active management of that habitat, the habitat you already own, I would like to see as much active management as you can to benefit the habitat diversity for both game and non-game species and particularly to have a balance of age classes with about 10 percent early successional habitat, and areas being kept open for traditional uses – hunting, fishing, bird watching, hiking, and vehicle access especially, and other traditional uses like trapping and so forth – in accordance with the state laws. For example, as was mentioned earlier, there are specific rules on the refuge that aren't part of New Hampshire's or Vermont's traditions. I think that all of the sporting activities should be governed by the state laws and not by the Federal folks in Washington.

[1:20:57 end]

Speaker #25, John Therriault

[1:21:03 start]

My name is John Therriault. I'm Vice Chair of the Cheshire County Republican Committee. I'm also State Director for the Convention of States Project trying to limit the overreach of the Federal government.

I oppose expansion of the Silvio O. Conte Fish and Wildlife Refuge. Just to put it in context, the current refuge is 36,000 acres. Options C and D would expand the refuge by 500 percent, adding 197,000 additional acres including 18,000 acres in Cheshire County. The Federal government today is borrowing money in order to run, and we have a question here of wants and needs. As somebody spoke earlier, the Connecticut River has cleaned up a lot and species are relatively healthy in the river. We do not need an expansion, so I don't support spending money we don't have for something we don't absolutely need.

The second is – Federal management, as we've heard other people talk of forests and grasslands, has proven to be relatively poor. As the American Lands Council points out, the hands-off, don't touch, museum management of lands, which allows only sort-of light recreational use - walking,

hunting, fishing, but no motorized use, no logging – winds up with a condition where the forest becomes managed for maximum combustion. All you need is a lightning strike and thousands or hundreds of thousands of acres go up in smoke and many times those fires end up bleeding over into private lands. There's one farmer I met when I was out in Las Vegas a couple weeks ago who lost 2,000 head of cattle to a fire that started on Federal lands and bled over onto his land.

And lastly, management has been – We spend an awful lot of money for very little results. Somebody mentioned bringing salmon back to the Connecticut River. I was born in Hartford, Connecticut, 61 years ago. I grew up in Hartford and Enfield, and back then, the government was working to bring salmon back to the Connecticut River. They spent decades and I don't know how many millions or hundreds of millions of dollars. I looked it up – Do you know how many salmon came through the Connecticut River in the run season from spring through the middle of August? 20. Not 20,000. Not 2,000. Not 200. 20 salmon. All that money was, in essence, wasted.

I would ask that you take a good hard look at what you're doing today with the 36,000 acres that are currently under management, do the best job possible you can with those acres, and don't add an acre more. Thank you.

[1:24:07 end]

Speaker #26, Steve Hardy

[1:24:13 start]

I'm Steve Hardy, a resident of Chesterfield, New Hampshire. I am also a forest manager working for my own business, Green Mountain Forestry. I manage timberlands and forestlands in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and New York.

As we are talking about Federal management, I just want to pull a couple things out to the forefront. It's nice to have this man talk about fire because that's what I want to talk about. The National Forest Service, over the last 30 years, because of the politics, they've reduced the harvesting on the National Forest by over 90 percent of the land that they manage, over 90 percent. However, now we have over 75 percent of the Forest Service budget is putting out wildfires because they're no longer managing, especially out on the West Coast where it really burns, that's where the real problems are and that's where all the Federal money is going for. They're not doing the planting. They're not doing the real management that they used to do. They're now just putting out fires. And I'll just leave on that thought of Federal management. Thank you.

[1:25:27 end]

Speaker #27, declined to speak

Speaker #28, Christine Destremps

[1:25:39 start]

Hi, my name is Christine Destremps I live in Harrisville, New Hampshire.

I support your efforts to conserve land along the Connecticut River. The reason that I support you is because currently there are almost a billion people on the planet who don't have access to clean water and its predicted that in 15 years half the world's population, or 4.6 billion people, will be living in areas where the demand for clean water will exceed the supply. I think when we're making decisions about our local water resources, which we are fortunate to have, that we should be putting the decision in the context of what's going on in the rest of the world because it's not going to be long before everyone is scrambling for clean water. I support what you're doing. Thank you.

[1:26:57 end]

[Hearing Officer made opportunity for speakers #1-10 to speak again]

Speaker, David Deen

[1:27:28 start]

[made comment making sure we got the correct spelling of his last name]

I am from Westminster, Vermont, as well as representing the Watershed Council tonight.

A couple of things – As I read the plan, forestry will be allowed within the refuge where it is appropriate. I would imagine that those standards of appropriateness would be the same standards that many of the foresters who spoke this evening – Oh, I'm not touching that land – they would exercise the same judgment.

Return of salmon – Yes, that program was doomed from the start because the tributaries were never opened up to migration of the fish, but I want to point out that this year we had a moderate record of shad make it to the limits of their historic range at Bells Falls. Nearly 40,000 fish made it into the reach of river from Vernon to Bells Falls. Back when, and before the era of requiring under NEPA – that term has been used here before – that, in fact, power stations had to balance environmental impact with power production and they were required to build and/or put in some means of passage of shad - someone said they grew up in the Enfield area. That's where the fish stopped. Back when I was in high school, I thought I was a great fisherman because I could go to Enfield and catch a whole bunch of shad. Well, every shad in the river was stopped at the dam at Enfield at that time – I'm that old. The dam was still intact. – Of course, I was able to catch fish. Now, fish are making it all the way up the river to the limits of their historic range to Bells Falls. Thank you.

[1:29:39 end]

Speaker, Ann Cartwright

[1:29:42 start]

I'd like to finish where I was talking about the Corexit, and then I went on to an example of the failure of US policy to increase the population of spotted owls and implement their forest management plans of timber harvest is explained full in another article I have where they have never implemented, I will just paraphrase, the management plan.

Next I will skip some, but I will go to my remarks after the spotted owl. We do not want to mimic the degradation seen in Russia, China, and eastern Europe because of unresponsive, bureaucratic government agencies. I present some problems that show up that we do not want to mimic.

Ok, now, we get to more information on - “Economic Growth and Environmental Improvement: Allies or Enemies,” an article by Tracy C. Miller. “Is there a fundamental conflict between economic growth and environmental protection, as many environmentalists believe? Although economic growth sometimes conflicts with protecting the environment, some actions that improve the environment also enhance economic growth. Economic growth may make it easier to protect the environment. Some of the worst environmental destruction occurs in places with extensive poverty. In poor countries, rivers are often polluted with human waste, erosion run-off because every acre is planted in crops.” I’ll skip some of it. “With higher incomes resulting from economic growth, people can afford to produce the goods and services they consume with less pollution. The reason things have improved so much in this country is because of economic growth giving us money to have less pollution.”

Now, the property rights path to sustainable development. This is another article. “Sustainable institutions are those that do not prescribe an outcome for society but allow an individual to improve their own well-being. Truly sustainable institutions provide the freedom for people to improve their world by innovating and developing. The best way to ensure that resources remain for future generations is to directly tie the well-being of people today to those resources by a decentralization and property rights. If individuals have the responsibility of caring for their welfare today, they are more likely to make decision that will benefit their children and their children’s children,” as in our example where we hope to pass it on, not to our entire family, but to the one who will keep it together and maintain it.

[1:33:20 end]

[Hearing Officer made opportunity for speakers #11-20 to speak again]

Speaker, Dorothy Carvalho

[1:34:10 start]

My name is Dorothy Carvalho, and I’ve had property or lived on property along the Connecticut-Rockingham since ’52.

I just wanted to say that the cleaning up of the river has been dramatic since my childhood. If we went up on top of Overlook Rock and look down into Bells Falls, you used to see the dyes pouring down the river from the paper factories. If we went fishing, we couldn’t eat the fish because they were covered with sores or cankers. You never swam in the river. We used to have a dump up the road from us, where we just dumped down the hill into the Connecticut River. That was the sort of thing that was done in those days, and it’s been cleaned up. Now I can go out on a boat. I can fish on the Connecticut. I can scuba dive in the Connecticut and its clean water. Anything that’s been done, I so appreciate. Whether or not it’s an issue of more lands being taken or just taking care of what we have – that’s a different issue – but thank goodness for what has been done since ’52 anyway.

[1:35:22 end]

Speaker, Jasen Stock

[1:35:26 start]

Just a couple of items I didn't touch on before that I did want to raise. One was, and it's a question I don't expect an answer given the format tonight but I guess in St. Johnsbury, the recording did cut out at some portion of the hearing and I'm curious if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is going to host another hearing or try to capture those comments. I had some members up there that got notices from you folks that said that they were told that their comments were not recorded. So that's a concern, and I would at least hope that you would send a notice out along those lines.

The other piece is the signage and the photos – Those were taken in the Mascoma area. Those are photos of the signs going up, and those were not around Pondicherry. This is a new area that the Silvio O. Conte wildlife refuge has targeted as a preferred conservation area. The issue that we have there is that we would have at least hoped that you would have at least gathered public input and got the sense from the public. And in fact, one of those photographs was taken by a Selectman – that the first time he had heard that this effort was even occurring. Outreach at the town level is pretty important, and I think there needs to be a greater effort to reach out. You have some Selectmen here, but there are other communities - in this case in Canaan, the first time they heard about this was when they saw the signs go up and they were pretty alarmed at that.

I guess the only other point that you've heard that I'll reiterate is that the Federal government isn't able to manage what it has already. We don't need additional Federal fee ownership. There are other vehicles. Private landowners have done a very good job managing lands and providing these multiple benefits that we all take for granted. I would just again urge option A with zero additional ownership. Thank you.

[1:37:42 end]

[Hearing Officer made opportunity for speakers #21-28 to speak again]

Speaker, Chris Rietmann

[1:37:53 start]

Just a couple comments that I didn't really get to because I did get interrupted.

The question regarding responsiveness kind of goes toward the question of stewardship and the underlying question to me, which is – Is the Federal government truly the best steward of our lands? I hope we're all asking ourselves that question. Do they have a track record of demonstrating that they have taken, in every case, they have taken land and they have improved for the people, for the fish, for the wildlife, for the flora and the fauna? I think that's the question. We're being asked to believe that the Federal government can do it better than any other agency or private ownership.

The second thing – They talk a lot about in the CCP is acceptable uses of the land – bird watching and hiking and things like that - but I wanted to talk a little bit about the experience in the Wapack National Wildlife Refuge over in Petersboro. Everybody familiar with that one? Ok, good. Here's a couple things you can do. In Wapack, you can go for a hike but, in Wapack, you cannot jog. So evidently if your knees bend too much or your toe hits first, that is now illegal in the Wapack area. As far as I know, you can't eat a sandwich in Wapack. You can have a sandwich, but you are no longer allowed to have a picnic. That's been forbidden by the Federal government in the Wapack National Refuge. So when I hear about we are not going to change the way people do things, we're going to allow you to maintain your snowmobiling, the things you've always been able to do on these lands, which New Hampshire has a wonderful system of allowing people to use our lands, it makes me skeptical. Thank you.

[1:39:56 end]

Speaker, John Therriault

[1:39:58 start]

I wanted to go back because there was a reference to New Hampshire State Law, and the issue I want to bring up is does the Federal government have the authority to manage lands in excess of what New Hampshire State Law would say. Under Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution, there's enumerated powers for the Federal government. Managing land, other than for maintenance of a standing army or protecting the states from invasion, is nowhere authorized in the Constitution. The 10th Amendment says any powers not specifically granted to the Federal government is specifically reserved for the states and the citizens. It tells me that our Constitution says you can't violate state law when it comes to acquisition of land because the state's powers preeminent, according to the Constitution, and therefore management of these lands should be left to private citizens or to the states and local authorities and the Federal government should not expand at all the refuge. Thank you.

[1:41:12 end]

Speaker, Patricia Rodrigues

[1:41:33 start]

I just wanted to talk a little bit more about the special corridor that leads from the Connecticut River up to the Ashuelot proposed area. The highest rank wildlife habitat corridor, according to the New Hampshire Fish and Game plans and maps, was just updated in the last few weeks from 2010 to 2015 maps and the amount of land that has gone out of being highest rank habitat between the Connecticut River and the proposed Ashuelot area is staggering to me that that much land could be taken out of that category in just 5 years' time. This just shows me that the economic crisis that the whole country's been going through for quite some years now is taking its toll. Yes, it is great that many private landowners are good at being stewards of the land but, unfortunately, it only takes a few bad eggs to ruin it for the rest.

As we all know, when it comes to projects being pushed forward, it often comes down to who has the most money to hire the best lawyer. I'm not one of those people. My concerns have not even been documented when I stand up in front of different groups lately talking about my concerns of this special habitat corridor. I want people to get online and look at your fish and

game website. One thing I can quote from it is that “New Hampshire’s economy and vitality relies heavily on people valuing its environment and wildlife in order to keep both its working youth from leaving and drawing tourists in. Per the Northeast State Foresters’ Association report, ‘The Economic Importance of New Hampshire’s Forest-based Economy,’ this is 2013, annual value of sales and output of New Hampshire’s forest products industry totals \$1.4 billion. Annual value of sales of New Hampshire’s forest-based recreation economy also totals \$1.4 billion. Fall foliage viewing is the number one contributor, followed in order by wildlife watching, downhill skiing, camping, hiking, snowmobiling, hunting, and cross-country skiing. If you notice in that list, there’s only one use that involves motorized uses. The rest are all quiet, peaceful uses.

[1:44:25 end]

Speaker, Anne Cartwright

[1:44:45 start]

When we were looking through your extensive document, we found, according to what we read, that in order to hay an area that you are managing for wildlife, like the meadowlark, that you would need a permit to hay that field. What is needed for the meadowlark is a field that hasn’t been hayed for at least a year or two, and then you want it hayed. Well, in actuality, there’s no one going to want to hay a field that isn’t good for livestock. You have not shown that you have any ability to do that yourselves.

Second of all, timber harvest – We were here at the presentation and we questioned what was going on, we were told that there was one place that you do want to timber harvest in your existing holdings but because it is not economically feasible you can not get anyone to bid on the project so it can’t get done. Without managing because your organization does not manage for people and people are part – we are part of the environment.

Now another thing – in the existing Umbagog – if I’m not pronouncing it right, I apologize – but I, years ago, heard what was going on and I contacted Robert Lord in Errol, and we had a long conversation about what was going on up there and how so much of the town was being taken over by the Federal government buying out property owners. The interesting other thing that happened – and I’ll tie that to another – is that one of the owners of a camp on Umbagog did not sell, did not want to sell their property. What happened to this elderly gentleman, who was a World War II veteran in his late 80s, was that the road to his place was closed by the Federal government so he had no access to his property. Now you say that can’t be. In Utah, back in 2011, Utah sues the Federal government over road closures which blocked people who still owned property from getting to their property and in fact some small towns. That’s what happens to people once you control enough of the property. That’s been shown here in New Hampshire.

Now, another thing – one last point – New Hampshire has a law that you are not allowed more than 2 percent of our acreage and, according to this that I took off the internet, already the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service – those organizations, and it has a map with different types of diagrams on it that show per state how much you already own - well in New Hampshire, we’re under the 5 percent to 20 percent, so you cannot buy more land in New Hampshire. Thank you.

[1:48:35 end]

Speaker, Ken Cole

[1:48:57 start]

My name is Ken Cole. I live in Winchester. There were a couple of fellas here earlier who are from Winchester. I more, or less, express my sentiment.

I moved to Winchester, New Hampshire, to the Ashuelot River Watershed. I would like to see a little more effort going into conserving some of our area there. I happened to have a property that I would be happy to give - I think it's a second order brook or waterway.

I wanted to speak about when I moved up here, I worked the second shift and there was - at certain times of the year, I couldn't go home at night without squishing hundreds, well probably not hundreds, of frogs across the river from a wet area or a low area over to the farmer's property. You don't seem them anymore.

Speaking about - The gal spoke about meadowlarks - We used to see the meadowlarks out in the field. The farmer would - He made somewhat of the effort. I think he did because I saw them there for several years and they're beautiful to see hovering above the hay fields. No more.

Around this time of year, there'd be yellow finches and bluebirds, dozens and dozens of them before they head south. They're just not making it anymore. Each year, it would be less than the last. Now, I didn't see any in there mortality rate of their young has just skyrocketed. So thank you for letting - I hope you can do something about this because we need it.

[1:51:11 end]

Speaker, Ken Urbanski

[1:51:15 start]

My name is Ken Urbanski, and I live in Langdon.

I came tonight to strongly voice my opinion against the CCP. I think it's interesting that we're talking about stewardship, and the environment, and being good stewards of the environment. To consider putting that in the hands of the Federal government, I think, is a joke. When the Federal government was founded, it was founded by the 13 original colonies and they were given two primary tasks: protect our borders and protect our rights. All I can say about stewardship is look at where we are today.

[1:51:51 end]

Speaker, Roger Noonan

[1:51:56 start]

My name is Roger Noonan. I'm the Executive Director of the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Districts, which are government entities. Each county has a Conservation District. The ethos of the Conservation District is locally-led, working with Federal, State, and local partners - voluntary - to promote voluntary conservation.

I'm not prepared to make a comment on the substance of the rule because I just got it brought to my attention that this was in play. I think that probably shows a failure in your outreach. I think I'm hearing a lot of failure of outreach in this meeting. I would urge you, when you are engaging with local partners – and I point to a project we just completed in the Seacoast on the New England cottontail, completely voluntary, managed to get a species not listed as threatened or endangered which has a big impact and that was a collaborative effort between the Feds, State, and local partners. Again the merits of this 300-page document, I'm not ready to comment on but will submit written comments. I just think the outreach and the collaboration with the local partners has definitely been a bit of a shortcoming. Thank you.

[1:53:15 end]

Speaker, Mitch Harrison

[1:53:18 start]

My name is Mitch Harrison. I'm a resident of Alstead. I'm on the Coldwater River Local Advisory Committee. I'm also a member of the Connecticut River Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

I didn't plan to make a comment tonight, but I feel a need to after hearing a bunch of comments here. I think that a lot of people in opposition, their opposition comes from a strong belief that the Federal government should own no land at all. I respect their opinion on that, but I think we have to take, we have to look at the individual merits of this proposal versus making broad, sweeping comments about whether the Federal government should own land or not. There have been failures by the Federal government in managing land; there have also been successes of the Federal government with managing lands. There have been successes by private landowners, and failures by private landowners. I think that it's important to look at the merits of the program of the proposal and I personally support what I've seen. I can tell you that, although I am not in the area of Alstead that's outlined, I personally would not choose to sell my land to you, but it is a choice. That's what people have to understand. Thank you.

[1:54:54 end]

Speaker, Ed Thomas

[1:54:55 start]

My name is Ed Thomas. I'm a Selectman for the Town of Marlow.

I just want to express my support of the gentleman who spoke of the outreach that you presented to the towns. We found out about this a couple of days before your first meeting that you had I believe you had in October. We have very little information about it. We're kind of shocked to hear about it. We're going to be certainly looking into all of this. Many of our town citizens have not heard anything about this. It's just been a surprise. So I just wanted to mention that.

[1:55:35 end]

Speaker, James Gardner

[1:55:41 start]

My name is James Gardner, from Keene.

I'd like to say that I oppose all the alternatives. If anything, I'd like to propose an alternative that you guys don't have up there, so an alternative E which would be to actually take the present-day Silvio O. Conte reservation and to actually shrink it, start to actually downsize it a little bit, maybe give the land back to the state instead of having it under Federal control.

[1:56:11 end]

Speaker, Mike Morrison

[1:56:16 start]

Mike Morrison, from Swanzey. I'm on the Conservation Commission and Southwest Regional Planning Natural Resources Committee.

My concern is that we not let political science overtake biological science. We have the Department of Fish and Game, which uses hunting and trapping to control carrying capacity, – those are management tools – and I would hate to see a situation where hunting or trapping was eliminated from the arsenal of tools that our wildlife managers in the state have at their disposal.

[1:57:01 end]

Speaker, Art Bingham

[1:57:05 start]

Good evening. My name's Art Bingham. I live here in Keene.

I haven't prepared any messages for this evening, but I am very much concerned with the attitudes of certain of us towards private ownership, private property. In my mind, this is a land grab. Many here don't want to hear that term, but I'm familiar and I know a lot of you are familiar with Agenda 21 and if you've read any of those 300-some pages, you will see the long-term goal of the Federal government through United Nations control is to get us off the land. At this point, it's being proposed in a more gentle fashion – let's protect the endangered species, which is fine. Private ownership has done quite a good job. I'm sure there are instances that could be pointed out where they haven't, but I could point out numerous – we don't have time tonight – to point out all those instances of mismanagement throughout the country, largely in the West, of the Federal government, so let's not even argue that. My point is we really need to look at our Constitution - the U.S. Constitution, the New Hampshire Constitution - laws that we should adhere to and laws that helped to build this country to what it was. The Constitution, as it has been mentioned tonight, does not allow the Federal government to own land. That's not their function. Their function is to protect us, not to get us off our lands. Thank you very much.

[1:59:24 end]

[End of Hearing]