

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

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TRANSCRIPT OF COMMENTS  
FROM  
WARREN PUBLIC MEETING

TAKEN NOVEMBER 10, 2015, AT 6:00 P.M.

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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 10th day of November, 2015, at 6:00 p.m., at the Warren Courthouse, 101 East Cedar, Warren, Arkansas.

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MELVIN MILLS: First off, I want to thank you for coming and allowing us this opportunity. Anything I say tonight is not pointed directly at y'all, because y'all weren't here. You really don't know where we're coming from. I'm not going to address it all. I just want to address a little bit. You left out one endangered species and that's us. According to U.S. Fish & Wildlife, 131,000 people quit hunting. I realize these are the same people that count the ducks and them ducks is up there with Hillary's emails somewhere, because we don't see them. Anyhow, that's an alarming rate. What that is, that's the tax payers and that's who is going to pay your salary. One hundred and thirty-one thousand people quit hunting between 2012 and 2013. I am going to tell you some of the reasons why.

For 38 years, my heart has been in that refuge. I don't need these notes. I've been at every waterfowl meeting they had. You've looked back at some of the records, and I think they have destroyed some down there that's not at your benefit. Early on, they took the people's land here, some of my wife's family and some of them here. They took it for wintering waterfowl. That is what congress

1 started this for and to float some barge up there  
2 that is leaking oil. That is where your water  
3 quality is going down right there.

4 Anyhow, the government was sued and the  
5 government won the lawsuit saying that up to 72 foot  
6 did not damage the green tree. It's a green tree  
7 reservoir and it doesn't necessarily have to be  
8 willow oak. The government won that lawsuit. Early  
9 on, they came in here and it was a great thing. They  
10 started flooding the refuge.

11 In 1977 is when I became involved. I hauled  
12 logs out of there for Potlatch. They had an  
13 agreement. They took the land for 180-something  
14 dollars an acre and was trying to get the logs out.  
15 I want to tell you a story about one area, and I've  
16 got the video to back up what I'm fixing to say.  
17 Now, this is before you came. There was a big  
18 cypress log down there and the water come up, and I  
19 moved it up there. It was just parked out there. I  
20 put my four-year-old boy on that log morning after  
21 morning. Several of these guys here put their kids  
22 on it. I raised that boy in that refuge. They  
23 flooded it and the ducks come just like they said  
24 they would. I carried congressmen, U.S. Fish &  
25 Wildlife directors, pro football players, you name it

1 all, and every one of them left there changed when  
2 they saw them fat drakes coming down through there.  
3 We shot a few hens, too. Anyhow, everything was  
4 going fine until every time they changed refuge  
5 manager and we are getting a new study and a new  
6 plan, you know. And we had one refuge manager that  
7 is concerned and he calls -- if you don't know who  
8 they are, I will bring them in there and leave you a  
9 copy. I've got a whole stack of all those meetings.  
10 I can tell you what happened in every one of them.  
11 They come up with some of this -- I saw this graph.  
12 I've got that graph here from 1996 that talks about  
13 the viable green tree reservoir. I've got that. We  
14 met and we all give in. That's it right there. We  
15 all give in, but we didn't want to kill the trees.  
16 We agreed to go 69 foot at the last meeting. Those  
17 ten people signed it, and the manager said, "Well, if  
18 we change this, we'll call y'all back." In 2010, we  
19 didn't get a call. That's why I give you the benefit  
20 of the doubt in the last meeting up here. I was the  
21 only one in this room to give y'all the benefit of  
22 the doubt. I am wiping that out after this. I mean,  
23 we want to see y'all do what you said you was going  
24 to do in the beginning. What happened with this last  
25 plan, they said the trees were dying. I did a little

1           checking on that. Did you know that Potlatch had CFI  
2           plots and during that same period 35 miles up here  
3           had the same problem. They had death in trees, slow  
4           growth. I've got it all right there. So it wasn't  
5           just a refuge problem. It was -- see, God knows  
6           where to put pine trees and he knows where to put  
7           hardwoods, and he puts them gum trees in there for a  
8           reason, too. We try to jack with that, and we mess  
9           it up. Out of that plan, it come down there where  
10          all these people sat on that log that I told you  
11          about. Trees die. My boy is dead. There are 300 to  
12          400 people that sat on that log. I've got a daily  
13          record of it since 1978. They come in here and they  
14          spotted every bit of it. I called the forester, and  
15          the first time he was lifting weights. The second  
16          time, he was getting his hair fixed. The third time,  
17          he called me back. Nice guy. He said, "Well, the  
18          studies say we have a species thing." I said, "What  
19          you are fixing to do is ruin it." I'm a logger.  
20          I've been around a little bit, and I've been around a  
21          bunch of foresters, some good and some not so good.  
22          A bunch of them leaned on that log I'm talking about.  
23          They've come in here, and I told him what was going  
24          to happen. They cut all the gum, most of the young  
25          oaks. We are going to leave these big trees here,

1 because they are going to put out the best acorns.  
2 Do you know what happened? They all blew down. What  
3 is down there right now is thorn trees and grass this  
4 high and cottonmouths. They ruined it for miles up  
5 through there. It won't never be the same, because  
6 of another plan just like we are hearing tonight. I  
7 keep hearing plan after plan. It was already fixed,  
8 you know. They did these studies long before y'all  
9 came. Now, after 40 years, my question is -- when  
10 they took it over, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, what they  
11 had and what they got now, it's not comparable. You  
12 showed them big trees there a while ago and that's  
13 before y'all showed up. Do you see what I'm saying?  
14 And that's where I'm coming from tonight. You've  
15 ruined -- you know, I'm old and gray headed, and I'm  
16 going out. But I've got video, with permission from  
17 the refuge manager, of riding a boat seven miles  
18 through there videoing how beautiful it is. You  
19 can't take a machete and go through there now. And  
20 I've not even got off down there at Carroll Slough.  
21 I mean, that looks like a bomb fell. It's terrible.  
22 And that's why -- there are some good things y'all  
23 have done. The draw down was great, and we tried to  
24 get that again and the Corps blocked it. We need to  
25 do away with that navigation mess. If you're not

1 going to flood the refuge, we might as well knock the  
2 dam out, because we're not worried about that boat  
3 that goes up there. I don't think none of us are.  
4 Well, you may be, but I ain't.

5 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I want to address a comment  
6 you made when you get through.

7 MELVIN MILLS: Okay. But I tried is what I'm  
8 telling you. These guys here will tell you. I've  
9 went down there and picked up trash. I've helped  
10 build boat ramps, handicap piers. I've tried and  
11 everybody in this room telling me I was stupid. I  
12 tried to work it that way. The only time it's  
13 worked, we had to go to the congressman, Jay Dickey.  
14 They put me out and said we ain't going to flood it.  
15 I've got the letters there telling how great that  
16 pool is and the trees are dead. If that's so great,  
17 let's cut them all down and flood the whole 65,000  
18 acres, but we don't want to do that. You know, them  
19 woodpeckers take care of themself. We've got a bunch  
20 of them up here. I hate to limit them one little  
21 spot. We need to let them fly over somewhere else.  
22 Now, I know y'all are bound by this and I understand  
23 that, and I'm not fussing at y'all. But what I'm  
24 prepared to do, and I don't want to do it, is to make  
25 a documentary of how the U.S. Fish & Wildlife has



1 destroyed what I thought was great. It won't never  
2 be the same. And I realize -- I've been down there  
3 at that mud and watched those ducks that had  
4 imprinted in that rest area. In Bradley County, when  
5 they held it, there were hundreds of thousands. They  
6 came back and it was dry. You know what they had to  
7 do? Fly down there and get shot all up and then five  
8 days it is over. You can go down there now and you  
9 better have -- you can't carry but a box of shells,  
10 but they need to be long, because they start shooting  
11 at them when they come off the river. I'm not going  
12 to address the four-wheeler roads. You know, every  
13 time we change managers, we get a new plan. And the  
14 people here, I hope I'm speaking for a lot of people,  
15 I know I am speaking for myself, we're tired of it.  
16 I am going to give you an option today and it is in  
17 all fairness, because I start out pushing for 70 foot  
18 and I had the chance. Congressman Dickey had the  
19 bill drawn up and Jim Johnson was our refuge manager  
20 and I said, "No. He is trying. Let him do it." It  
21 was fixing to be mandated by congress to flood it 70  
22 foot. I want you to think about flooding it starting  
23 December 15th and raising it two tenths a day until  
24 you get to 68 foot. Now, that's fair. Hold it for  
25 15 days and then start letting the water out a tenth

1 every other day until you get it out. Do that for  
2 five years and then come back up here to this  
3 courthouse, and we'll talk about these woodpeckers  
4 and everything else. We will see that y'all are  
5 serious about working with us, the taxpayers. I --  
6 that's where I'm at. Now, we've got the other  
7 option, and we can call that the public option, M1,  
8 or whatever y'all want to do. The other option is  
9 not a good option and that's to go to the congressman  
10 and senator and mess with funding, and we don't need  
11 to go down that road. I've been down it and it's not  
12 a fun road, because that just makes y'all mad  
13 and -- I've been down it, and it's not a good road.  
14 What happens is they sent the warden up there to  
15 check you because you've been outspoken, you know,  
16 and I've been down that road. He was really nice  
17 early on. Rambo, he helped us learn to stack our  
18 ducks at camp and all that. We went through all  
19 that. We are a lot better people than we used to be.  
20 But I thank you for coming, and I'm going to let some  
21 of these other guys address the trails and all that.  
22 We need to see something from y'all besides a new  
23 plan. Thank you.

24 TINA CHOUINARD: It's comments like that that  
25 really actually help us. You gave us a solution to

1 the pollution.

2 GEORGE HART: I want to thank you. Melvin,  
3 thank you. It is obvious to me where your heart is.  
4 You said a lot. I want to address one specific  
5 thing, which had to do with the fast dying timber in  
6 the last five years on the refuge. Mr. Stroeh, you  
7 said someone gave you skewed data when it came to  
8 comparing red-cockaded clusters. The data that y'all  
9 have gathered addressing the jet-rocket speed dying  
10 of timber in the last four or five years, you are  
11 giving credit to the flooding of the refuge. That is  
12 skewed data. We have been through a historic drought  
13 and flood. I think we had three years of flood  
14 followed by two years of drought, severe. I recall  
15 vividly from a forestry class years and years and  
16 years ago when my forestry professor said that a  
17 drought behind a flood in hardwood bottomland is much  
18 more severe than either one in duration by  
19 themselves. Do not give all of the credit for the  
20 dying timber over the last five to six years to the  
21 raising and lowering of water, because your data was  
22 gathered during a very peculiar time. It may have  
23 been in the 40s or the early 50s when we had drought  
24 behind a flood. I don't remember. But I do  
25 know -- and I don't even know the years. It may have

1           been '09, '10, and '11 when we had the floods and '12  
2           and '13 when we had the drought. Where my heart is  
3           and where it hurts me, I went to the refuge manager  
4           and begged him to change that draw down to the first  
5           of November, hold 18 inches for two weeks, and let it  
6           go. He didn't give me the time of the day, because  
7           it was going to kill the timber. I said, if you  
8           don't moisten that soil, you are going to see. And  
9           he didn't. I'm through.

10           TINA CHOUINARD: Thank you for your comments. I  
11           appreciate those.

12           TOMMY MAXWELL: I have no data or information  
13           with me. Melvin was very prepared, and he did a  
14           great job. I do know several things. I've been a  
15           duck hunter all my life. I started when I was seven  
16           years old. I'm not bragging, but me and my company  
17           own four green timber reservoirs. Everybody here  
18           knows that I don't have to hunt Felsenthal anymore.  
19           I feel blessed to be able to hunt other places, but I  
20           love to have the opportunity to hunt there when I  
21           want to and enjoy it. I know that I've been hunting  
22           green tree reservoirs that have been flooded since  
23           the 40s and maybe some as far back as the 30s. The  
24           dead timber issue is not as bad as what you describe  
25           here. I mean, they flood them every year. They

1 start October 5th or October 10th and most of them  
2 leave water on them until at least the first of  
3 February. I mean, they may leave a little more on a  
4 little longer and drag it off slow. The ones I have  
5 personally been involved with, most of the timber  
6 dying is from blow down, you know, blow down in a  
7 storm. I will say a couple of other things about the  
8 refuge. I am not questioning -- I don't know if your  
9 data is right. But I would say this about the  
10 refuge, it looks like, to me, that if you make a lot  
11 larger rest area, you're going to make a lot of  
12 people mad. The registering gets a lot harder. I  
13 don't -- my point of view, if you go down below where  
14 it is now and add another 6,000 acres or whatever  
15 you're talking about --

16 MICHAEL STROEH: No, no, no. It --

17 TOMMY MAXWELL: More rest area or less?

18 MICHAEL STROEH: Less.

19 TOMMY MAXWELL: Less rest area. Okay. If you  
20 make less rest area, you will probably make a bunch  
21 of people happy. I've been around Felsenthal ever  
22 since I was a kid. I've hunted down there like  
23 Melvin said. It's a great place. Those numbers that  
24 he described were numbers of hunters that have  
25 stopped hunting, that's disturbing. That's

1           disturbing. I've talked to hunters who have quit  
2           hunting ducks in Felsenthal or quit hunting ducks  
3           period. They just quit going. Frankly, they go out  
4           and take somebody hunting, kill one duck or two  
5           ducks, or no ducks, and then they feel like they get  
6           harassed on the way out by some game warden. I mean,  
7           you know, check today, check tomorrow, and check the  
8           next day. Well, I've still got a license when it's  
9           been three days in a row. That's not only an issue  
10          on federal refuges. It's an issue on state refuges,  
11          too. Now, there are violators out there. I  
12          understand all that. I just feel like Melvin made  
13          some great points about plans and taking into account  
14          the real, important issues. I like the option he  
15          offered you and suggested. I think -- let me go back  
16          a little further. I am trying to get my thoughts  
17          together here. I was manager of the Crossett Chamber  
18          of Commerce in the early '70s when this all came  
19          about. Some of my friends right out here got upset  
20          that I was for it and behind it. We had a meeting in  
21          Monroe, Louisiana, and a lot of folks showed up down  
22          there. But the big sale was that we're going to have  
23          navigation, and we're going to hold 300,000 to  
24          400,000 ducks every winter. I could probably go back  
25          and dig up the paper somewhere. I am sure they've

1 got them in the Crossett Chamber of Commerce archive.  
2 Jack Lee wanted navigation. And all of us -- it was  
3 wonderful because we are going to get water and we're  
4 going to get ducks, and it wasn't long and the ducks  
5 started showing up, I mean, by the thousands. There  
6 wasn't anybody that knew anything about duck hunting  
7 that could shoot a shotgun at all that couldn't go  
8 down there and shoot their limit of ducks. I mean,  
9 it was great. It was wonderful for everybody in this  
10 room and thousands that are not in this room. But  
11 that was the sale to the tax payers. These people  
12 right here, paid for that. Thousands of others, paid  
13 for that. You can say that it came from duck stamp  
14 money or whatever you want to say. There is still a  
15 tax. They paid for that refuge. They paid for  
16 maintenance of it and all the people that enjoy it.  
17 I've talked to folks from El Dorado and everywhere  
18 else. Basically, the hunting at Felsenthal isn't  
19 that good anymore. It was sold to the citizens on  
20 the basis of navigation and duck hunting. That was  
21 the two key issues. I was in lots of meetings that  
22 went on. After a while, you know, when it came about  
23 and the hunting got good, everybody said, "This is  
24 wonderful. We were wrong." That man sitting right  
25 there and the one behind him. It was great. I just

1 think there has got to be a happy medium somewhere.  
2 I think you need to be very careful about tweaking to  
3 much, to the negative, especially on the water. I  
4 mean, again, answer me the question of why these  
5 green timber reservoirs -- if you guys have been  
6 doing it for 40, 50, 60, 80 years, all that timber is  
7 not dead. They put water on it every year. I am  
8 talking about year in and year out. Now, I know  
9 there is a plan that was put together with some  
10 people that said you ought to leave the water off  
11 every three to five years or whatever. Well, that's  
12 for guys that have got ten places to hunt, like  
13 George Dunklin. I love George to death, but he was  
14 born with 40,000 acres. Most people don't got that  
15 many places to hunt. Most guys that got a green  
16 timber reservoir are just straining to pay for the  
17 thing and working their butt off every day to make  
18 enough money to pay for it. I am blessed, but I am  
19 for these guys right here. I think this refuge is  
20 for the guys that are working their butt off all week  
21 at \$12 an hour and wants to take his son hunting on  
22 Saturday and have a good time. I think that's what  
23 the refuge should be for. All the benefits long term  
24 of providing wildlife and red-cockaded woodpeckers  
25 and all that is going to come about, because it's



1 just part of that process. Thank you.

2 TINA CHOUINARD: Thank you very much.

3 STEVE RICHARDSON: I came to this meeting. I  
4 basically quit hunting Felsenthal. We all were  
5 raised in it and knew all about it. Yes, everything  
6 they have said, there is a lot of credence in the  
7 fact that they couldn't get the money to put the  
8 navigation system in unless they made the green  
9 timber reservoir. That was the whole thing behind  
10 getting the money to put the navigation system in.  
11 That was done. I got about three questions. Number  
12 one, you've got Alternative A, B, and C. What part  
13 of this plan are we going on? Are we going on A or  
14 are we going on B? Are all three of them --

15 MICHAEL STROEH: Possibilities or a combination  
16 of all three. We are throwing it out to you for  
17 comment. Tell us what you like about them.

18 STEVE RICHARDSON: You don't have a set plan  
19 right now? One of them would be A and one would  
20 be --

21 MICHAEL STROEH: We have our proposed  
22 alternative, the one we think is the best. This  
23 whole process is for you to come and provide  
24 comments. The final product may be a combination of  
25 all three.

1                   STEVE RICHARDSON: That was my first question.  
2 My second question is, if we got all this detriment  
3 that is happening to the species of trees that are  
4 preferred, why do we not take some of this research  
5 money and plant the trees that we need? That would  
6 give us -- 20 years down the road, we would have some  
7 results on that if we planted nuttalls and water  
8 oaks, willow oaks, or whatever. The other point that  
9 I need to make is, if you're not going to flood the  
10 refuge, why do you need a sanctuary or rest area?  
11 Why don't you let them hunt the whole thing? I mean,  
12 you're not flooding it for the ducks. You are trying  
13 to not flood it, because of the trees. So why not  
14 hunt the whole thing and just do away with the rest  
15 area? That's my points and that's all I have to say.

16                   MICHAEL STROEH: Thank you.

17                   TINA CHOUINARD: Do you want to answer those  
18 questions as best you can?

19                   MICHAEL STROEH: As far as the sanctuary, I will  
20 just quickly say, you know, it's -- waterfowl  
21 sanctuaries are a cornerstone of waterfowl  
22 management. But natural flooding -- we are still  
23 saying there is going to be natural flooding, so the  
24 sanctuary there, you know, even if the natural  
25 flooding -- if it floods, great duck hunting. If it

1 doesn't flood, we still have the sanctuary under  
2 those scenarios. To me, the sanctuaries are key for  
3 waterfowl management. I will quickly just  
4 address -- it has come up here regarding the planning  
5 plans and things. I will tell you if we could  
6 eliminate planning, my staff would just love it and  
7 so would I. Bottom line, I work for the government  
8 and a bureaucracy, and we like to drown people with  
9 plans. So is planning going away? Probably not.  
10 And I understand some of your frustrations. We have  
11 CCP and we just keep piling on all these different  
12 things. It's not going away. Just because of the  
13 nature of the beast that we work for, there is always  
14 going to be some planning. Congress has said this  
15 process, the National Environmental Policy Act, this  
16 is the reason we're here. We are supposed to be  
17 doing this. Have we done this enough where we've  
18 come out to the public? Probably not. But we should  
19 be -- this is what that process says we have to do,  
20 and that's been in effect since 1969, I believe. It  
21 is a longstanding act. We are supposed to be doing  
22 this more often, and we're probably not doing  
23 that -- you know, planning is brutal. I will say  
24 that we're not getting away from it. We have to be  
25 better at -- like I said, maybe we have to circle

1 back around here five years from now to have a  
2 meeting if nothing new has changed or whatever or  
3 just for feedback from you guys to find out what your  
4 feelings are. I think that's a valid point that  
5 maybe periodically we have to circle back with you.  
6 I take that comment, and I think that's a great idea.  
7 I am sorry, but the planning ain't going to go  
8 anywhere. It is just the nature of this beast that I  
9 work for. I don't care for it myself. I would  
10 rather do other things, but it is that. I hear you,  
11 and I really do respect the comments saying that  
12 maybe we need to do a better job of circling back  
13 around to you. And I also agree with one of the  
14 comments you said about historically. I know from  
15 what few notes we have left in the office, yes, the  
16 GTR flooding and the navigation were the big issues  
17 at that time. That was talked about and that was  
18 sold. We sold it to the public at that time. That's  
19 what we did. I don't doubt that a bit. There are  
20 things, though, that I will have to say. Change  
21 happens and we have learned more and we're better at  
22 it. I will just use this as one example. One of the  
23 things that I uncovered in my research, I am trying  
24 to get familiar with the history of this area, they  
25 were citing one plan of why we're doing the GTR in

1 1958. It was a forester out of Mississippi State  
2 with the U.S. Forest Service, and he talked about  
3 that it doubles the growth of the trees annually.  
4 Well, that's not true. Our science has gotten better  
5 over time. They cite that plan in the first forest  
6 management plan that they wrote for the refuge.  
7 We've gotten better at our science and we're just  
8 bringing forth that science to you. We probably have  
9 to do a better job of articulating that. We are  
10 bringing what we're seeing in the forest to you and  
11 some of it is not good, and we're concerned. We are  
12 concerned down the road. Now, with the duck hunting  
13 and stuff, I don't see duck hunting ever going away  
14 at Felsenthal. I only see it as a strong part of  
15 that. As an agency, I will say we are very concerned  
16 about hunting. Hunting is declining, no doubt. It  
17 has been our bread and butter for all these years,  
18 and we're not sure if -- the agency doesn't know what  
19 to do quite yet. These declines are significant.  
20 The states are worried about it, because that's their  
21 bread and butter. These -- what is happening on  
22 these refuges, it is a concern. It is a new reality  
23 we're stuck with, and I don't know where -- we are  
24 still wading through that and trying to figure out  
25 what is the best path forward. But hunting is not

1 going anywhere. We hear that a lot of times, but  
2 hunting is not going anywhere, as far as I can see  
3 down the road. We will always have some type of  
4 hunting on this refuge. It may change, but we should  
5 always have hunting on this refuge.

6 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Is it your final decision?

7 MICHAEL STROEH: The decision -- our regional  
8 director, she, most of the time, concurs. Our  
9 regional director is a female. But they can go  
10 against me. It has happened in the past. It is a  
11 rare occasion. We bring forth our reasons and this  
12 is what the public said, all the comments and  
13 everything. We prepare this whole document and we  
14 move it forward. And he brings up a good point.  
15 What's the time line here? I will quickly just say  
16 that the plan is -- after we get all the comments, we  
17 have to categorize comments and respond to comments,  
18 and then we have to draft a finding of no significant  
19 impact and then we bring it to our regional director.  
20 I am hoping January or February time frame that it  
21 gets all signed off on and the final decision is  
22 made. So you should have something out to the public  
23 at that time of what that decision was.

24 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Let me ask you a question.

25 Have you compiled how you deviated from the original

1 mission statement when Felsenthal initially came in?  
2 That's what the people were told and that is  
3 concerning. To me, one of your slides should be this  
4 is how we deviated since we've been in existence.

5 MICHAEL STROEH: Felsenthal was established  
6 because of that navigation project, but it is these  
7 two acts of congress that dictate in everything we  
8 do.

9 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Well, let me just inject this.  
10 I remember the legislator at the time that was in my  
11 district. Jody Mahony and I prevailed upon the  
12 Arkansas Game & Fish and put, at that time, \$500,000  
13 into this thing. People were very skeptical.  
14 Arkansas Game & Fish partnered with y'all to some  
15 degree. The people were told this is what you're  
16 going to have and I think it's deviated. At one  
17 time, you could go down and your parking lots were  
18 full. What I hear from these people, that's not the  
19 case anymore. That should have somebody's concern.

20 MICHAEL STROEH: Points taken. This is what  
21 congress told us and, you know, everything is going  
22 back to that. I understand what you're saying.

23 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I will just close my remarks  
24 with this. To breach that, it's almost like you  
25 force this group to have to go to congress to call

1 the hand that's being played, and that's not the way  
2 it should be.

3 MICHAEL STROEH: And I agree.

4 BILL BURCHFIELD: I want to make a comment  
5 before I forget. Mr. Richardson made the comment or  
6 asked about planting trees. That is something we've  
7 looked at and done in the past and has failed most  
8 likely because of spring water honestly. It's not an  
9 option for us without -- I mean, you've got to have a  
10 harvest to get sunlight. If we just plant under a  
11 dying forest, trees falling out individually won't  
12 provide enough sunlight. That oak will never make it  
13 into the canopy. So if we were to plan on planting  
14 or put money into planting, we would have to know for  
15 sure that we have the sunlight, and that's something  
16 we could control with a harvest. But not knowing  
17 what the spring water will do, you could put all that  
18 time and money into it and it be wiped out  
19 completely. So there is no way -- the regeneration  
20 of bottomland hardwood forest counts on those dry  
21 years, and we can't ensure a dry year. So if we  
22 plant in January, we can't know what's going to  
23 happen in the spring. It could be a total waste of  
24 money. There have been -- there have been container  
25 trees planted and seedlings planted with pretty much



1 no survival with that being the reason. So that's  
2 why we haven't gone down that avenue.

3 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I mean, we're going under the  
4 idea that the natural water flow and everything else  
5 was the way that it should happen, and now we've  
6 changed it by flooding. So there are certain years  
7 that those trees had to be able to get out, because  
8 they were there.

9 BILL BURCHFIELD: That's right. You may do a  
10 harvest to get regeneration and if you did nothing,  
11 it may take ten years.

12 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Clear cut harvesting?

13 BILL BURCHFIELD: No.

14 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Have you done any release  
15 harvesting?

16 BILL BURCHFIELD: We've done -- we do patch  
17 cuts.

18 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: If you -- did you replant?

19 BILL BURCHFIELD: We have planted in some of  
20 those in the McIntyre Bay area. They planted  
21 container trees -- three gallon or maybe five-gallon  
22 trees with zero survival. We have trees now. We  
23 did -- In '03 to '05, at McIntyre Bay, they did a  
24 harvest. It was a fairly heavy harvest for a portion  
25 of it. The intent was regeneration. In 2010, when I

1 started, they were -- there were basically no oak  
2 trees there. We stopped flooding -- the last year we  
3 flooded, I guess, was the natural flood in 2010, and  
4 we haven't flooded since. That was cut in '03 to '05  
5 and five to seven years later, there were no oak  
6 trees. From 2011 to now, it is just a carpet of  
7 probably eight to twelve foot tall nuttalls.

8 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: So they are naturally coming  
9 back?

10 BILL BURCHFIELD: They are naturally coming in.

11 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Unfortunately, I guess the  
12 years that was planted, we had a flood and it killed  
13 them?

14 BILL BURCHFIELD: Right. And that's why we  
15 don't. Some people do try to plant. But we don't  
16 have any way to control spring water. It could be a  
17 total waste of money. More years than not, eight  
18 times out of ten, it's going to flood in the spring.  
19 So the odds are good that it could be a waste.

20 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: My point would be that we need  
21 to spend on preferred trees rather than research  
22 about we need to stop the hunting and stop the  
23 flooding because we are killing the trees. That's my  
24 point.

25 JOEY MANN: I've been duck hunting now

1 for -- this will be my 20th year to duck hunt down  
2 there. I've seen it as good as it gets and as bad as  
3 it gets. I don't think that we're asking much to get  
4 some water in the winter. Granted, y'all flooded it  
5 back years ago from way early to way late. I don't  
6 know if that damaged it or not. I don't know. But  
7 what is a month or a month and a half of water going  
8 to hurt them trees in the wintertime? Me and Larry  
9 Peterson, the guy before you, talked about -- he was  
10 talking about water damaging this and that. I can go  
11 out there and count stumps of dead trees. The way  
12 that place was cut is a freaking joke in a lot of  
13 areas. It's just -- all these guys right here are  
14 loggers. It's a joke. What I want to know is about  
15 this year. Are we out with no water, period?

16 MICHAEL STROEH: No, not this year.

17 MELVIN MILLS: The good Lord will give us some.

18 MICHAEL STROEH: If it comes up naturally, yes.

19 JOEY MANN: Through these public meetings, you  
20 are basically -- you are at the halfway point. What  
21 is your general consensus you got from the previous  
22 one and this one right here? Pretty well everybody  
23 wants some water?

24 MICHAEL STROEH: We are hearing that, and we  
25 knew we would hear that.

1           JOEY MANN: Is that going to resonate with you  
2 going into this decision?

3           MICHAEL STROEH: Yes. We take the comments as  
4 they come in, all of the comments in their totality.  
5 We look at all the options that were put forward and  
6 we try to make the best decision as we move forward.  
7 We do hear the comments and we take them into  
8 consideration.

9           JOEY MANN: Which way are you leaning right now?

10          MICHAEL STROEH: Well, what I'm saying is that  
11 we brought out our proposed alternative, and it's  
12 kind of the one that we thought would be the best  
13 plan. I made no bones about that. We think that's  
14 the best one.

15          JOEY MANN: Which one is that?

16          MICHAEL STROEH: B. But once again, I take the  
17 comments in their totality. I will basically fall  
18 back to the land acquisition expansion. Bradley  
19 County had proposed changes, you know, and based on  
20 those comments, we made changes. So there is -- we  
21 take -- we have to meet -- I have to meet my  
22 policies, my laws, and regulations by using the best  
23 science possible, and what the public said. Using  
24 all of that in totality, that's what I make my  
25 decision on. We brought forth the plan and now we're

1 getting the comments. Once all that comes in, that's  
2 what we will base our decision on.

3 JOEY MANN: Are you a duck hunter?

4 MICHAEL STROEH: I haven't duck hunted in years,  
5 but I have been out in the past.

6 JOEY MANN: Give us a little water, come with  
7 us, and we'll change your mind.

8 MICHAEL STROEH: Okay.

9 JOEY MANN: Thank you for coming, too.

10 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Is "B" the proposed plan?

11 TINA CHOUINARD: That's our proposed plan.

12 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I can't read, because I don't  
13 have my glasses. But is "B" holding no water?

14 MICHAEL STROEH: That is correct. Like I said,  
15 it's not -- it doesn't have to be A, B, or C. It  
16 could be a combination of them. We have to throw  
17 something out for everyone to digest and then --

18 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Why is "B" your proposed plan?

19 MICHAEL STROEH: Because it's got -- through all  
20 the alternatives and options, we think it's the best  
21 plan moving forward for the refuge, in terms of the  
22 forest, water quality, all those factors. That's why  
23 we think "B" is best.

24 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: It doesn't have any duck  
25 hunting water in "B"?

1                   MICHAEL STROEH: That's correct. Unless it  
2 naturally floods. If it naturally floods, great.

3                   GEORGE HART: The data you've got over the last  
4 five or six years has helped come to the conclusion  
5 of that proposal?

6                   MICHAEL STROEH: Yeah. The data that --

7                   GEORGE HART: It's skewed data, because of the  
8 combination of severe flood followed by severe  
9 drought. Now, Mr. Stroeh, we are in empathy with you  
10 whether we come across as we are or not. We are  
11 dealing with a duck of a different color. I have  
12 pulled my hair out. How can my daughter's farmland,  
13 a green tree reservoir in Bayou LaGrue, be managed  
14 with water on and water off since the 1940s with no  
15 problems whatsoever? She did not begin by putting an  
16 extra two feet of water on her farm before she  
17 implemented her plan. We all realize that willow  
18 oaks grow in one elevation and the nuttalls at  
19 another elevation. Before you started with an extra  
20 two foot of water on the whole system, which changed  
21 the entire bottomland hardwoods, which we didn't know  
22 and we didn't know what happened, but we're getting  
23 ready to see -- we have empathy for you, because  
24 you've got a difficult job.

25                   MICHAEL STROEH: And I would say that one point

1 I will make with you is that I do recognize that,  
2 yes, flooding stresses the trees. Drought stresses  
3 the trees. The combination, you know, of one  
4 stressor to another stressor -- yes, there is  
5 mortality associated with those stressors, and I  
6 recognize that. I just wanted to point that out.

7 BILL BURCHFIELD: Just on the data, so you don't  
8 think we're making up numbers here, there are two  
9 studies. In 1985 and 2006 were the studies. We've  
10 got this data from '85 on. You're looking at 30  
11 years of data. It's not my data or Michael's. We're  
12 not making up any numbers since we got here. We have  
13 this information. These are hard measured trees.  
14 These are actual trees measured every five years for  
15 three decades. In each paper, you've got 46  
16 references on one and you've got 30 on another. They  
17 all reference similar trouble on other GTRs all over  
18 the southeast United States. So the first one, I  
19 think, in '96 references 179 different GTRs and 81  
20 percent of them had issues. Most of the managers of  
21 those had similar problems to what we are having.  
22 There are not a lot of studies as long as ours, but  
23 there are several that are over 25 years. Some of  
24 them didn't show any problems until year 20, but they  
25 do now. Even though -- at '95 we thought -- the

1 researchers thought, Well, you've added three feet of  
2 water, so you would expect ground water change and  
3 other things change other than just the flooding.  
4 This is normal to see this. Trees next to the pool  
5 were falling out and that's normal, but it's  
6 increased and it's gotten worse. So from '01 to '06  
7 has been the worse section. That could still be  
8 partially from that three feet. I'm not saying it's  
9 not. I'm just saying this is the data we have to  
10 work with, and I can't walk through the woods and  
11 just look at it and dispute this. So that's just  
12 where we're at on the data.

13 MICHAEL STROEH: And once again, I'll just add  
14 to -- as our knowledge increases with this study and  
15 stuff, you know, we're learning things -- swell  
16 water, something we've never talked about, you know,  
17 the water comes off the land and you can walk across  
18 it without getting your feet wet, but what's going on  
19 under ground, the root system still could be  
20 saturated, because all that water has to move out of  
21 there and down and the water table has to lower. It  
22 moves through the soil at a much slower rate. So  
23 even if the water has come off the forest, you still  
24 have a lag time where your root systems are  
25 saturated. There are some studies out there with the



1 white oaks that the root system still seems to be  
2 actively growing even in the dormant season. So when  
3 you put water on them, you change some processes that  
4 these trees are depending on and you are depriving  
5 them of oxygen and whatever. The trees are adapted  
6 to flooding, but they're adapted to up and down and  
7 not stagnant water. The natural flooding is what the  
8 trees are adapted to. Raising the water level and  
9 letting it sit there -- the problem is -- last year,  
10 you know, the flood came in January and it just  
11 stayed until July, so the trees -- that stagnant  
12 water sitting on top of them is really more of the  
13 problem. They like that up and down, those flood  
14 pulses. Those are things that -- our knowledge is  
15 growing and it's a complex system. I think one of  
16 you mentioned how complex it is. It is a complex  
17 system. It's not just one thing.

18 MELVIN MILLS: Have you looked into the  
19 possibility that during those years y'all held the  
20 water to the first half of June to provide spawning  
21 for the fish? Did y'all know you did that?

22 MICHAEL STROEH: I actually have not read that.

23 MELVIN MILLS: Yeah. I have it right here. I  
24 will tell you, I've been to school. They threw that  
25 away, because they didn't want you to have that. A

1 lot of my duck hunting buddies have died. Trees are  
2 going to die. What I'm saying, that looks like a big  
3 problem to me. Instead of letting it out, they held  
4 it to the middle of June. The big tree doctor that  
5 met with us said it takes seven years. You add that  
6 up. If you're careful, you'll figure out that's when  
7 the trees died. See, I need to be on the staff down  
8 there.

9 MICHAEL STROEH: Can I see that? I don't know  
10 if I've ever seen that.

11 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I've got a question for the  
12 forester. How long have you been there?

13 BILL BURCHFIELD: I started the last week of  
14 2009.

15 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: So were you there when they  
16 cut that area over around Carroll Slough?

17 BILL BURCHFIELD: No. They cut it starting in  
18 '03 and finished, I guess, the year before I got  
19 there.

20 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Do you have any idea what  
21 their goal was there?

22 BILL BURCHFIELD: I do. After looking at it, I  
23 mean, it was -- it's kind of a normal cut for us. It  
24 was a thinning with regeneration patch cuts. The  
25 idea was to put roughly ten percent in the area in

1 patch cuts. They was somewhere between a half acre  
2 and three acres in size to regenerate red oaks. This  
3 is just me looking at it after the fact. I wasn't  
4 here, but after the fact, you can see in aerial  
5 photos that there was a lot of wind throw. They cut  
6 an area to save maybe 60 with holes in it and wind  
7 came through in probably the springtime when it was  
8 wet and blew over maybe half the trees that were  
9 standing. That's why it ended up the way it looks.  
10 It does look bad.

11 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: What about the reproduction?  
12 Have you checked it?

13 BILL BURCHFIELD: There is reproduction. That's  
14 what I was referencing earlier. There is  
15 reproduction there. Since 2010, there has been  
16 reproduction that has hung on. We planted -- we went  
17 in there and planted some sample plots for seedlings  
18 all out through there. A year later when we came  
19 back to do seedling survival, you couldn't find the  
20 trees we flagged for all the natural regrowth. It  
21 has hung on. I went and looked at it when the water  
22 came down in July and it was still there, the  
23 majority of it, and some of it fell out because the  
24 water was so high.

25 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Is that just in certain little

1 areas or over the whole cut?

2 BILL BURCHFIELD: I mean, it's scattered over  
3 it. There are some areas that are still just button  
4 bush. It's not 100 percent over the whole cut, no.

5 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: My question was, that area,  
6 and I don't know how many acres it is, but the area  
7 that was cut like that, tree loss there compared to  
8 what this water supposedly is damaging, I mean, how  
9 do you think that rates?

10 BILL BURCHFIELD: Well, the first part, south of  
11 the ATV trails, 1,500 acres, and then a few years  
12 later, they cut 1,000 acres on the other side, so  
13 that's 2,500 acres, which is a big piece.

14 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: That's a pretty big sample  
15 plot.

16 BILL BURCHFIELD: It's a big sample plot. Not  
17 all of it was cut that hard.

18 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I understand trying new things  
19 and hardwood management is a tough deal anyway, but  
20 2,500 acres?

21 BILL BURCHFIELD: Only ten percent was cut for  
22 regeneration. If you've been south of Hoop Lake, we  
23 cut 475 acres in 2012 and 2013. It has patch cuts  
24 that are for regeneration, but we only put them on  
25 the ridges. We didn't put them in the low spots,

1 because we weren't sure we could get -- we hadn't  
2 seen that regen at McIntyre at that point, so we  
3 didn't put holes there, because we didn't know if we  
4 could regenerate it, and we didn't want to cut it.

5 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: What I'm looking at, that area  
6 that y'all done, that 2,500 acres, that was one of my  
7 areas that I liked to hunt, and it's ruined for me,  
8 my son, and my grandson, and probably my great  
9 grandson. The areas that haven't been touch and are  
10 still natural, they are losing some trees here and  
11 there, but my son, grandson, and great grandson can  
12 benefit hunting that area, and that other area, it  
13 looks like a hurricane came through there. It will  
14 never be the same, ever.

15 BILL BURCHFIELD: I understand that. I do know  
16 it looks bad. It looked bad to me when I looked at  
17 it the first time. One thing, you can't totally  
18 predict winter. I think the objective -- I don't  
19 have anything in it, so I can say honestly. I think  
20 the objective was regeneration. I think what they  
21 did was a normal accepted practice. I think it was  
22 real bad timing, but they didn't know that  
23 beforehand. We have made changes.

24 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: If you were going to test an  
25 area like that -- if I was doing that for somebody --

1 I'm in the hardwood business. If I was doing that  
2 for somebody, I wouldn't take a 1,000-acre block and  
3 say, Let's try this and see what happens.

4 BILL BURCHFIELD: I agree. It was --

5 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: You don't think --

6 BILL BURCHFIELD: I wouldn't cut 2,500 acres,  
7 period, not in one place.

8 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: My final comment would be to  
9 say that that area was destroyed by the planning and  
10 poor decision making by somebody. I'm not blaming it  
11 on y'all. That had a bigger impact than this little  
12 bit of flooding that we're asking for would ever have  
13 on that refuge.

14 BILL BURCHFIELD: I appreciate that. The only  
15 thing I will say, for positive, it will be the only  
16 hardwood stand of that age at some point. If  
17 regeneration continues down the road, that will be  
18 one of the few stands of young hardwoods when other  
19 hardwoods around it are falling out. That was an old  
20 stand. That area was actually one of the areas that  
21 had not been cut until after World War II.

22 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Mr. Jeff Scott, a logger here,  
23 logged that in 1968. They cut it and thinned it and  
24 the logs were rotten. They left about 50 loads piled  
25 up there. That was cut in '68 then.

1 BILL BURCHFIELD: I didn't say it hadn't been  
2 cut since then. I said it hadn't been cut before  
3 then. It was -- a lot of Bradley County and Union  
4 had been cleared in the 30s. That area had not been.

5 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I have a question. Is this a  
6 15-year plan?

7 TINA CHOUINARD: Yes.

8 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Why 15 years?

9 MICHAEL STROEH: It coincides with our CCP. We  
10 are supposed to rewrite that every 15 years. I took  
11 the -- I'm trying to look down the road. It could be  
12 longer than that. You know, if there is minor  
13 changes, it may not come -- it may be just minor  
14 tweaks that we do and it doesn't necessarily have to  
15 come back out to the public. If there is a major  
16 change, it has to come back out to the public. Once  
17 again, that is the planner/bureaucrats in Washington  
18 that said 15 years. I don't know why it is 15 years.

19 MELVIN MILLS: Have you been up there south of  
20 the bone yard, where I logged at in the early 80s?  
21 That's still beautiful up there. When a tree blows  
22 down, the Lord plants another one. It was even hard  
23 to shoot the ducks there last year. The water got up  
24 quite a bit. You know, we prayed and prayed, but we  
25 didn't pray specific. We got a lot of water in May.

1 We are going to pray more specific now. We asked God  
2 for water, but we didn't say when. You ought to go  
3 up there and look at that. That is the way it was  
4 first logged when they first started cutting. They  
5 were really particular. Some of the old trees are  
6 blowing over. Those young trees are still there. It  
7 takes 25 to 30 years to make an acorn or that's what  
8 they taught us in school down there at the refuge.  
9 If one blows over, the ones coming up will have a  
10 chance. That's why we don't put all our eggs in one  
11 basket.

12 BILL BURCHFIELD: That's right. And that's the  
13 idea or the objective, those ten percent in  
14 holes -- none of them -- I mean, they say a half  
15 acre to three acres are hard pressed to find a hole  
16 and you won't find a three-acre hole at Hoop Lake.  
17 That's what -- I hate to say research again, but  
18 that's what it shows. That's how much sunlight  
19 you've got to have if you want to get oaks. That's  
20 the reason and that's what it's for, to prevent  
21 having to do big clear cuts. You know, when you look  
22 at it in the scheme of things, five to ten percent of  
23 1,000 acres in holes is not a lot.

24 GEORGE HART: I promised the congress  
25 representative that I would not open my mouth



1           tonight. However, several things have been said that  
2           I feel compelled to address. A previous manager of  
3           the refuge told me why they raped the Carroll Slough  
4           and the reason was that we didn't have young trees  
5           coming up in a mature forest. The idea was to remove  
6           the canopy and let the sunlight in. Bottomland  
7           hardwoods don't reforest that way. They reforest the  
8           way he just described. What happened with the  
9           drought behind the flood was that the grass got what  
10          moisture there was and the oaks, with a root system  
11          this deep, they died. Now, over the last 25 years,  
12          for some odd reason, I have gotten a feeling with  
13          addressing just about anyone with the federal  
14          government, whether it be the Corps of Engineers or  
15          the service. We are the professionals, and we do not  
16          work for you. We are James Hamilton. We are going  
17          to tell you how it's going to be. This is the way it  
18          is. Mr. Stroeh, I beg you to look for a  
19          representative that knows this and has his heart in  
20          the right place before you make your decision. He is  
21          probably in the room with us right now. Take  
22          his -- he would have told you that leaving a hardwood  
23          tree every 150 feet is going to do nothing but blow  
24          over the first wind. He would have told you  
25          bottomland hardwoods do not rejuvenate themselves by

1 removing the canopy. Instead of saying that anybody  
2 that is not an employee of -- y'all didn't mind at  
3 all when I got you your paychecks back in '95. The  
4 government shut down. I was fortunate enough to get  
5 a hold of the regional director who helped me get a  
6 hold of our government, who paid your paychecks when  
7 the government was closed. Y'all didn't mind me  
8 getting involved with that. When I was -- I was dead  
9 serious with what is going to happen to this Carroll  
10 Slough bottomland, and I was ridiculed by service  
11 representatives. You need somebody whose heart has  
12 been in that bottoms. This gentleman's  
13 daddy -- well, that would probably be a conflict of  
14 interest. His heart is in those bottoms. He knows.  
15 Just because they don't have a degree in a particular  
16 area of your concern, that does not mean that what  
17 they know does not count, because it does. Please,  
18 please, please have some advisors.

19 TINA CHOUINARD: Thank you. We appreciate that  
20 very much. Anybody else? We need to hear from you.  
21 We need to know what you think of the plan. We need  
22 specifics. We need to know what you like and what  
23 you don't like and what you want.

24 SCOTT McGAHA: I am a duck hunter. Mills' plan  
25 sounds perfect to me. As a young man, I sat on that

1 log he talked about. My question is about the draw  
2 down. As somebody that uses the refuge year round,  
3 what does the draw down do for the upper Saline in  
4 Bradley County? I mean, you know the Ouachita has  
5 its channel, but what about the Saline?

6 MICHAEL STROEH: As far as I know, yes. The  
7 Saline has got some deep pockets and holes through  
8 there. I don't know the average depth through there,  
9 but it will -- the flow should still be there through  
10 the Saline.

11 SCOTT McGAHA: There are guys there with boat  
12 docks that were built with 65 being low water. We  
13 don't want those docks sitting on the ground. I  
14 didn't know if y'all thought about that or not.

15 MICHAEL STROEH: That has not come up as a  
16 concern. You are the first one that's raised it.  
17 Yes, it's a valid concern.

18 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I have a question. You have  
19 an A, C, and a B plan and one plan is to leave it  
20 like it is. And before you make your decision, can  
21 these be tweaked? I mean, can A or B be tweaked?

22 MICHAEL STROEH: Yes.

23 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Or can we have a D?

24 MICHAEL STROEH: The answer is maybe. It will  
25 cost us there, because if we have not evaluated it

1 and it has not been presented to the public, then we  
2 would have to come back out to the public. I am  
3 hoping that we have evaluated the different options  
4 here enough that if it is a minor change, it  
5 shouldn't be a problem. If it is something major,  
6 then I would have to bring it back out to the public.

7 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: If you combine B and C  
8 together like you talked about earlier, would you  
9 have to come back out to the public for that?

10 MICHAEL STROEH: No, I don't think so. I have  
11 evaluated them and they were presented to you. It  
12 would be some combination of that, so I don't know  
13 why we would have to come back. The final plan would  
14 be released to the public saying that this was our  
15 decision we made.

16 TINA CHOUINARD: And those are the details that  
17 we need. You know, what part of B do you want and  
18 what part of C do you want? What part of A do you  
19 want? You know, those specific comments help. We  
20 can't read your minds. You know, I'm not from this  
21 area. I don't live here, and I'm not making the  
22 decision, so you don't have to worry about that  
23 either. But the thing is, the more you can help me  
24 and him to understand what part of which alternative  
25 you like or you don't like, or if you want us to

1 consider something else, those are the specific  
2 comments that we need to hear in order to make the  
3 best decision and the decision that you feel best  
4 represented by. That is -- we are your employees.  
5 We are working for you. That's why we are here  
6 tonight. We are not just here for a song and dance  
7 routine.

8 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Let me ask a question. If the  
9 majority of people want water, are we going to get  
10 water?

11 MICHAEL STROEH: It's technically not a  
12 popularity contest of whoever gets the most votes.  
13 Like I said, I've got to -- if everyone there -- I  
14 have to worry about laws, regulations, and policies  
15 and establishing purposes for the refuge. I will  
16 take all of those comments to tally how we can best  
17 move forward in the future for the refuge. That -- I  
18 have to use all of those things. I don't want to say  
19 that it's a popularity contest of which one everyone  
20 likes the most. Some things -- I am going to get  
21 comments -- let's use the draw down as an example.  
22 Bass fisherman may not like that draw down. So, you  
23 know, we are going to get comments supporting -- duck  
24 hunters are going to like the draw down. You've got  
25 to balance those needs out there, and that's what we

1 have to try to do. We get all the comments and we  
2 try to balance everything.

3 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: You were talking about -- you  
4 haven't mentioned how maintaining the channel with  
5 the Corps of Engineers comes into play in all of  
6 this.

7 MICHAEL STROEH: I met with the Corps and we  
8 discussed a plan that I proposed a draw down and  
9 cited our 1995 plan that we did. There was also a  
10 paper published and the Corps has used that paper for  
11 some of their stuff now. They have no environmental  
12 concerns. The only thing that would probably trump a  
13 draw down -- say that I'm proposing a draw down this  
14 next year, but if there is a navigation issue, that  
15 may delay it a year. I may not be able to do it this  
16 year, because there are navigation issues.

17 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: So the parameters would be  
18 what as far as the channel is concerned?

19 MICHAEL STROEH: Nine foot. It has to maintain  
20 the nine foot. Right now, we have an 11-foot  
21 channel. I've got a foot to play with. I am only  
22 proposing a one-foot draw down. We should be good on  
23 most years. I think the draw down will be a benefit.  
24 I don't anticipate any issues. I throw that out  
25 there, because navigation was a primary purpose for

1           that lock and dam. I can't rule it out that there  
2           may be a conflict somewhere down the road. I just  
3           want to make sure everyone knows that there is  
4           potential for a conflict. What that is, I don't  
5           know. As far as what I've been told, they have not  
6           locked anything in Thatcher for nine or ten months  
7           now. There isn't a whole lot of barge traffic, so I  
8           don't think it is going to be a huge concern for us.  
9           Once again, I've just got to keep that in mind and I  
10          want to make sure everyone understands that. We  
11          don't want to interfere with the navigation aspect of  
12          it.

13                   UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I really think, and what you  
14                   really don't understand, is that each one of these  
15                   guys remember what the refuge was when they took  
16                   over. Any time you manage land or manage timber,  
17                   what is your goal? To make it better; correct? My  
18                   question to you is, in 40 years, since 1975, do y'all  
19                   believe y'all have managed it to make it better? Do  
20                   you see where we're coming from, looking from a 40-  
21                   year span, and you are the seventh guy to come in  
22                   here? I know the golden rule. The man with the gold  
23                   makes the rules. I understand that. But you have to  
24                   understand that we are looking back 40 years. Have  
25                   y'all managed our money and land better than what

1                   somebody else -- I mean, I want to know what y'all  
2                   think. Do y'all think y'all have done a great job?

3                   BILL BURCHFIELD: I think it was better before  
4                   we built the lock and dam.

5                   UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Say that again.

6                   BILL BURCHFIELD: I think it was better before  
7                   the lock and dam was built. But in that same --  
8                   you've got to be fair now. On my side of that, we  
9                   are dealing with what is left from previous. You  
10                  can't put all that on us at this point in time.

11                  UNKNOWN SPEAKER: The first several years -- I  
12                  remember Melvin did the first cut in 1983 or whatever  
13                  it was. If y'all will go up there and look at that  
14                  200-acre lot up yonder, use that as your plan,  
15                  instead of somebody else that told y'all and didn't  
16                  have their information right to start with. That is  
17                  something that is a 30-year plan. You can walk. You  
18                  can look. You can measure trees. You can manage the  
19                  regen. That is good. If it looks like the rest of  
20                  it did, you need to go back to school. You can't sit  
21                  there as a forester and tell me that was good  
22                  management. That's all I want to know. Do y'all  
23                  feel like y'all have done -- I say y'all but you are  
24                  the fifth guy or tenth guy to be here. The refuge,  
25                  have y'all done a good job managing the timber and



1 the resources that was there in 1975 to 2015? Do  
2 y'all think --

3 MICHAEL STROEH: I would say that, overall, we  
4 are heading down the right path, yes. Have we made  
5 mistakes? Yes. Did I agree with all the decisions  
6 that were made prior to me? Probably not. I can't  
7 go back and second guess them. This is what I have  
8 now. So I think we are striving, always, to be  
9 better. I am hoping that's exactly what we are  
10 getting. Sometimes along the way there are mistakes  
11 and stumbles or whatever. We have some big  
12 challenges.

13 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: We are looking back and that's  
14 just how we are judging it. I know we all seem like  
15 we are throwing you under the bus. But when you have  
16 been here 40 years and watched it from point A to  
17 point B -- do we think the deer hunting is better now  
18 than it was then? Do we think the duck hunting is  
19 better? When you take a piece of land and manage it,  
20 I think we ought to make it better. That's all the  
21 people that I deal with are wanting to do. We are  
22 looking back at that window and you are looking at  
23 what somebody gave you. We have been deceived. We  
24 lived from A to B. We don't have PhDs and all that.  
25 But if you stand still long enough and watch, there

1 is a good chance you are going to learn something.

2 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Why are we starting to close  
3 all the four-wheeler trails little by little?

4 MICHAEL STROEH: Well, this is the process  
5 for -- you know, some of them were closed earlier,  
6 too.

7 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: When I hunt with Melvin, I  
8 cannot ride my four-wheeler, because I've got to load  
9 everything up in a truck, go to Perryview and unload  
10 to go meet him. I could come out through the trail,  
11 but I can't ride on the trail. There used to be  
12 trails. Some of them goes to places that you don't  
13 even know were there. It's closed. So now we can't  
14 go fishing in the springtime. There is no way to get  
15 there now. I mean, there is no need to keep closing.  
16 That's for the public to enjoy and get on their four-  
17 wheelers and ride.

18 MICHAEL STROEH: What I would suggest is to  
19 please submit your comments. That's -- we hear that  
20 kind --

21 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: It's closed in the summer  
22 months. Why?

23 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: It's like y'all don't want  
24 recreational use.

25 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: In the summer months, when

1           it's dry, we cannot ride down there. Why is that?  
2           In May, June, and July, you couldn't ride the trails.  
3           Why?

4           MICHAEL STROEH: We have them closed for a  
5           variety of reasons. ATVs are well documented in  
6           scientific literature to cause all kinds of damage,  
7           disturbance. We laid that out in the plan. I hope  
8           we are clear enough why we chose the ones to close.  
9           Bottom line is those damages. We still have 40 miles  
10          of trail. A lot of the trails that were closed were  
11          short trails and some of them aren't used very often.  
12          Some of them are loops. Some of that joyriding --  
13          disturbance is an issue, too. We are cutting some of  
14          that back. It is also down to a more manageable  
15          size.

16          UNKNOWN SPEAKER: In ten more years, you're  
17          going to walk. We are going to walk 64,000 acres.

18          MICHAEL STROEH: Well, I didn't purpose to  
19          eliminate all the trails.

20          UNKNOWN SPEAKER: They took some six or seven  
21          years ago out and now you are going to take how  
22          many -- eighteen more miles. I mean, enough is  
23          enough.

24          MICHAEL STROEH: Your comments are heard here.

25          UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Y'all know we pay taxes on

1 that every day of the year, not just the winter  
2 months. We pay for it year round.

3 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Do you think the ATVs hurt the  
4 system down there as much as that cutting machine did  
5 over there at Carroll Slough? The Ouachita forest  
6 has hundreds of miles of ATV trails that are open  
7 year round. What is your scientific evidence?

8 MICHAEL STROEH: There are several papers out  
9 there.

10 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I've got a really good  
11 question. You mentioned Washington DC a while ago.  
12 How much influence or pressure are y'all getting from  
13 Washington D.C. to tweak things a certain way? You  
14 mentioned a while ago that this plan has got to be  
15 submitted.

16 MICHAEL STROEH: It doesn't go to Washington.

17 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Just your regional director?

18 MICHAEL STROEH: Yes.

19 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I can tell you, from working  
20 with the National Hardwood Federation, that the  
21 national forest is being taken away from the public  
22 to use in almost any way in a lot of places. They  
23 won't let you ride a four-wheeler through it. It's a  
24 big issue. These are millions and millions and  
25 millions of acres that we've bought and paid for.

1 I'm just making a point. That is coming from  
2 Washington D.C. and maybe your deal is not. I hope  
3 it's not.

4 TINA CHOUINARD: It's not.

5 STEVE RICHARDSON: I just need to make a  
6 comment. It seems like, I mean, we're talking about  
7 biblical things. The Corps is God and y'all are the  
8 apostles trying to manage under them. Your job is  
9 nearly impossible, because they don't care if it  
10 kills 30,000 acres of timber or 15,000 acres of  
11 timber or 40,000 acres of timber as long as they get  
12 their channel. If we look back at economics, how  
13 much economic benefit have we had out of all those  
14 barges that are going to Camden on this nine-foot  
15 channel or eleven-foot channel versus the recreation  
16 we would be getting out of this if we related it and  
17 tied it together? I think you are going to find that  
18 the sport hunting, bird watching, everything that  
19 y'all are trying to do, is tenfold more than what the  
20 Corps is putting back in. They -- I guess they  
21 control all the shells in the shell game.

22 MICHAEL STROEH: The navigation -- congress has  
23 said that they are responsible for the navigation.  
24 That is --

25 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: We don't have any navigation.

1           MICHAEL STROEH: Well, I can't argue that point.  
2 I am just saying they've got their mission.

3           UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I mean, we're losing out here.  
4 The Corps, when they proposed the channel, we clear  
5 cut 15,500 acres down there, because it was going to  
6 be flooding anyway and die.

7           MICHAEL STROEH: Right.

8           DANNY NICHOLS: You commented that you believe  
9 the refuge is going in the right direction. Can you  
10 elaborate on the direction you're going? I know I am  
11 probably the youngest guy in here, but I bet I can  
12 speak for all these guys by saying that our direction  
13 would be that the refuge get utilized to its fullest  
14 extent by the public. By removing the flooding,  
15 you're taking away the habitat that was originally  
16 created for this refuge. You are taking away one of  
17 the main aspects of the refuge, which is waterfowl  
18 hunting and recreation to do with waterfowl. So what  
19 is your direction that you're talking about?

20           MICHAEL STROEH: And I think what we're -- if I  
21 am understanding your question exactly, the direction  
22 would -- what we're proposing in this plan, whether  
23 it be plan A, B, or C, I think both are positive  
24 directions that we're going with the refuge. Do I  
25 have a preferred one? Yes. But this is that

1 process. This is the process we're going through.

2 DANNY NICHOLS: I guess, more specific, you say  
3 you're heading in the right direction, but what is  
4 your goal you're trying to reach?

5 MICHAEL STROEH: A healthy forest.

6 DANNY NICHOLS: But what is Felsenthal's goal?  
7 What was it created for?

8 MICHAEL STROEH: Migratory bird conservation,  
9 maintenance and management of wildlife resources  
10 thereof, and the habitat.

11 MELVIN MILLS: There is a paragraph missing on  
12 that. They might not have give it to you. The  
13 original act of congress said it was for wintering  
14 waterfowl. That's above all that mess there. It was  
15 for wintering waterfowl. That is what it was  
16 established for, along with the navigation project.  
17 Y'all have left that off, and that disturbs me,  
18 because that's what -- winter waterfowl needs water  
19 and food. That's left out. I will look at the house  
20 and try to get that. It's right on the beginning. I  
21 have read it, and I've got a copy of it somewhere.  
22 On the original deal that congress passed, it says it  
23 was for wintering waterfowl. We don't want that  
24 changed. There is a deal in here that says why we  
25 want to do this. God give them birds long legs so

1           they could wade that water.

2           TINA CHOUNARD: I know we have kept y'all for a  
3 long time. It's 8:00. Before anything else, I just  
4 want to say thank you so much for spending so much  
5 time with us tonight and for putting in the effort  
6 and coming out. I know that all our lives are very  
7 busy. I just appreciate y'all coming out and putting  
8 your heart into this and letting us know what you  
9 think. You do need to also write it down on paper of  
10 what you want. Thank y'all for coming. We  
11 appreciate it.

12           (WHEREUPON, the proceedings were concluded in  
13 the matter at 8:01 p.m.)

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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.

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NICOLE HARTWICK, CCR

Certified Court Reporter #739