

passed to the State. We are looking into the matter and will inform the committee further.

Though relatively small in size, Pelican Island represents habitat biologically significant to the east coast of Florida. Historically, and continuing today, the refuge supports and provides breeding habitat for a large number and variety of marsh and water birds.

The islands in the refuge are separated from the mainland by the shallow, brackish waters of the Indian River. Dense stands of black mangrove form an almost solid canopy over these islands, hiding the miniature ground "forest" of air-roots which are characteristic of this species. Red mangrove, with its tangle of prop roots, occurs as a fringe, of variable width, around the shores. Pickleweed forms a dense ground cover where the mangrove canopy is thin, and submerged stands of shoalgrass, widgeon grass, and various algae are abundant in the surrounding water.

A public hearing was held in Vero Beach, Fla., on April 5, 1967, and 32 statements, unanimously in favor of the wilderness proposal, were presented or read into the record. In addition, a number of petitions and resolutions in support of the wilderness proposal, were received from 34 organizations, and signed by over 1,260 individuals.

These statements illustrate a great public interest for the protection of birds and their habitat, protection of estuarine and fisheries resources, and the long-range preservation of the scenic, esthetic, and ecological values of this area.

As coastal land and water areas continue to be developed, Pelican Island refuge will become increasingly important, not only for its value to fish and wildlife resources, but because it represents an ecological type that is rapidly disappearing from the east coast of Florida. Permanent preservation of the refuge islands as wilderness and the surrounding bay bottoms, in their natural condition as part of the refuge will insure a source of continuing enjoyment for residents and visitors alike.

Mr. Chairman, the historic significance of Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, prompted the National Park Service to declare it a national historic landmark in 1963. In this, and by its biological and ecological significance, we believe the Pelican Island wilderness to be an excellent addition to the national wilderness preservation system.

Mr. Chairman, the proposed wilderness units in these bills meet the basic criteria for consideration as wilderness. We in the Department of the Interior view them as important links in the biological chains of life. To the naturalist, scientist, and student of nature they are outdoor classrooms. They represent a significant cross section of habitat necessary to the preservation of several species of endangered wildlife. We consider them to be excellent additions to the national wilderness preservation system and respectfully request your consideration and approval of these units.

These are some of the recommendations we have had in mind as we looked at the wildlife refuge and wilderness proposals and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have on any of those proposals.

Senator METCALF (presiding). This material supplied will be a part of the file for the use of the committee. Thank you for a very comprehensive statement.

Do you have any questions, Senator Hansen?