

Mr. Chairman, this is an auspicious day for the wilderness program as these excellent proposals move into the final stages of the procedures to give the wilderness status to 10 units within the wildlife refuge system. These proposals illustrate how constructive the Wilderness Act's procedures are: They have been carefully considered and all parties have been heard. We believe the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has done an outstanding service in preparing these proposals. The Bureau and the Department of the Interior are to be commended for the way they have moved ahead with these refuge wilderness reviews.

These proposals will bring breadth and diversity to our national wilderness preservation system, especially the diversity of geographical location. We are bringing wilderness and all its multiple values to the eastern United States—not by diluting our wilderness standards, but by quickly grasping the last dwindling opportunities where we can find them.

As members of this committee know, the Wilderness Act recognizes that most of our public wild lands which remain are already in some kind of Federal jurisdiction. We are fortunate that the purposes these areas already serve do not hinder their wilderness and that protection of that character is in fact complementary to their present purposes.

This is true of the wildlife refuge areas now being considered for wildlife status. Wilderness area designations are supplemental to, and would not supersede the original management objectives of the national wildlife refuges, which are designed for the benefit of wildlife and to secure its proper protection. The provisions of section 4(a) and 4(b) of the Wilderness Act declare that the act is to be supplemental to the purposes for which national wildlife refuges are established and administered. Wilderness areas are to be administered so as to meet the purposes of wildlife protection for which the refuges were established and in such a manner as to preserve and project their wildlife communities. They are to be administered within the wilderness area concept to provide public recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical enjoyment insofar as wildlife management objectives permit. Therefore, we can expect to see—and will support—appropriate restrictions on public use of refuge wilderness, where such uses would conflict with the area's wildlife purposes.

In discussion of wilderness area criteria, size has often been considered to be a factor. In this connection, the exact wording of the wilderness law's definition of wilderness is important. Section 2(c)(3) states that a wilderness “* * * has at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practical its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.” In other words, areas meeting all other criteria of wilderness should not be denied protection simply on the basis of size if they are, in fact, of a size and configuration making practicable their preservation and use as wilderness.

The late executive director of the Wilderness Society, Dr. Howard Zahniser, referred to the matter of size in a memorandum he prepared in 1949 for a Legislative Reference Service study of wilderness. Dr. Zahniser's words then concerning the Wilderness Society's view of this matter are pertinent today: