

Committee on Resources

Full Committee

Witness Statement

Written Testimony

to

Committee on Resources

U. S. House of Representatives

May 3, 1999

Testimony by

William Clifford Smith

In Support of

Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999

H. R. 701

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee on Resources, I am William Clifford Smith, a Civil Engineer and Land Surveyor from Houma, Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana. I have lived in this area all of my life.

The community in which I live is 65 miles southwest of New Orleans and 30 miles north of the Gulf of Mexico. This area is between the mouth of the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers. We truly live in the Delta area. The Mississippi and its tributaries provide drainage and navigation improvements for 41% of the surface area of the United States, of which all of this water and navigation flows through Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico.

Over the last approximately 100 years, the United States government has leveed and controlled the Mississippi River and tributaries for flood control and navigation improvements.

It is estimated that approximately 70% of the grain exported from the United States traverses the Mississippi River through Louisiana to international markets. For the benefit of the nation, these flood control and navigation improvements have had some protection to our area, but it has also been a major cause of the coastal deterioration of our lands.

In my community, over the last 60 years, we have lost approximately 400,000 acres of surface area to the Gulf of Mexico. This has primarily been caused by the controlling of the rivers and the cutting off of the delta building process. At the same time, the exploration for oil and gas in coastal and offshore Louisiana

has been accelerating; and the navigation and access canals for pipelines and other transportation needs have intensified this deterioration.

Not only has our area provided vast amounts of oil and gas for consumption by the United States economy, but we are also the major port of embarkation for foreign oil coming into our nation. It has been estimated that 70% of the energy consumed in the United States originates from the Gulf Coast.

I believe that House Bill 701 is a proper way to allow funds to flow from the United States Treasury to areas such as ours for truly mitigation benefits for the improvements necessary to reverse the environmental impacts that are being affected in this region. Because of the sacrifices our region has made for energy resources, flood control, and navigation, it certainly seems reasonable that some of the direct wealth that our area contributes to the national treasury should be used to mitigate, control and manage the recurring natural resources that we have remaining.

Our fragile coastal area is still truly a national treasure and probably is the most productive ecological area in the whole nation. We provide vast amounts of seafood to this nation, and if the alarming coastal erosion problem is not properly managed this vast resource for our nation will be lost forever.

Surely we in Louisiana cannot afford, and should not be expected, to provide all the funds necessary for the resource management necessary to reverse some of these drastic environmental and ecological changes that are happening to us.

Since we now have documented that we are losing, in Louisiana, approximately 35 square miles a year to coastal erosion, we humbly request that House Bill 701 be approved by this committee and enacted by Congress as quickly as possible.

#