



April 26, 2016

Dear Representative:

The undersigned organizations are writing to strongly oppose the proposed sale of thousands of acres of the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge in Puerto Rico. We represent more than 6 million members and supporters around the United States, including over 7,000 residents of Puerto Rico. When the House Natural Resources Committee considers H.R. 4900, the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), we urge the Committee to remove Section 405, Land Conveyance Authority, Vieques National Wildlife Refuge, Vieques Island.

America's public lands provide tremendous economic benefits, and developing them or selling them off is a short-sighted and counterproductive way to attempt to reduce debt. Furthermore, selling a national wildlife refuge in the immediate aftermath of the armed takeover of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge lends credence to the militants' efforts to trigger a mass give-away of public trust lands to private owners. Selling Vieques specifically is fiscally irresponsible. The money raised by selling Vieques will barely make a short-term dent in Puerto Rico's economic crisis.

The loss of Vieques will, however, put an immediate end to all of the economic benefits the refuge provides to Puerto Rico through more than a quarter million annual visitors, quality of life improvements for nearby communities, and the ecological services provided by the refuge. Vieques was voted as the fourth best refuge in the entire National Wildlife Refuge System in a 2015 poll. That may have something to do with the fact that it provides rare unspoiled Caribbean beaches and coastal landscapes within 40 miles of well over a million people. It is also rich with wildlife, and is helping to recover fourteen threatened and endangered species by providing them irreplaceable core habitat.

Vieques is an important contributor to the economic, ecological, cultural, and public health of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is a territory in need of the economic drivers that public lands are proven to provide. The Puerto Rico economic crisis should not be taken advantage of to advance an anti-public lands agenda at the expense of the people that live there and visit there. Vieques National Wildlife Refuge was established so that its more than 17,000 Caribbean acres "shall be managed to protect and preserve the natural resources of the lands in perpetuity." Section 1508 (d), Public Law 106-398 (October 30, 2000).

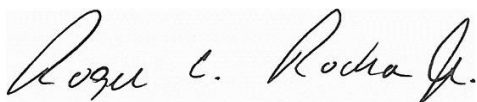
We ask you to honor this important commitment to the American and Puerto Rican people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Collin O'Mara".

Collin O'Mara
President and CEO
National Wildlife Federation (NWF)

Nathaniel González
President
Sociedad Ornitológica Puertorriqueña, Inc. (SOPI)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger C. Rocha, Jr.".

Roger C. Rocha, Jr.
National President
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Camilla Simon".

Camilla Simon
Executive Director
Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO)