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Statement by The Honorable John Fleming
Chairman

Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs

At the Oversight Hearing on

Why We Should Care About Bats: Devastating Impact White-Nose Syndrome is Having on
One of Nature's Best Pest Controllers

June 24, 2011

Good morning. Today we are having a follow-up hearing on a subject this Subcommittee first examined in June of 2009. Since it was first discovered in caves west of Albany, New York in 2006, the White-Nose Syndrome has killed more than 1 million bats. It has spread to 18 U. S. states from Maine to Kentucky.

Despite a considerable amount of effort by six federal agencies and various affected states, which have spent more than \$16 million, we are apparently no closer to stopping this disease which has devastated more than half of the 47 species of bats native to North America.

Why is this hearing important? Bats consume vast amounts of insects and according to the April edition of *Science* magazine, their value to U. S. agriculture is between \$3.7 to \$53 billion each year. In the United States, they pollinate more than 360 plants and are so effective in dispersing seeds that they have been called the "Farmers of the Tropics."

Also, certain bat species can capture from 500 to 1,000 mosquitoes in just one hour. A single colony of 150 big brown bats in Indiana has been estimated to annually eat nearly 1.3 million pest insects. We also know that the one million bats that have already died from this fungus would have consumed between 660 and 1,300 metric tons of insects each and every year. By losing these bats, farmers and timber harvesters now have to spend millions of additional dollars to buy pesticides to protect their crops and trees.

As a doctor, I was interested in learning that some 80 different medicines come from plants that need bats to survive. While it is reassuring to know that no human illness has been associated with exposure to infected bats or caves, it is important that we try to find out why this fungus is killing bats in the United States, yet not causing mass mortality in Europe.

Although this disease is spread through bat-to-bat contact, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the U. S. Forest Service have closed thousands of caves and abandoned mines in an effort to try to

stop the spread of this disease. I am interested in finding out the results of these efforts and determining whether prohibiting human caving activities has saved hibernating bats.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses on how we can effectively address what many experts are now calling: "The most precipitous wildlife decline in the past century in North America."

I am now pleased to recognize the gentle lady from Guam, Madeline Bordallo, who chaired the first comprehensive Congressional hearing on the White-Nose Syndrome, for any statement she would like to make on this important subject.