

May 5, 2016

Re: Religious Community Opposition to the National Wildlife Refuge Conveyance Provision in the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (“PROMESA”) H.R. 4900.

Dear Member of Congress:

As faith organizations we write in support of America’s protected public lands. We urge you to oppose any efforts that undermine and give away public land protections. In particular, please eliminate the current provision in the PROMESA legislation that would give away thousands of acres of National Wildlife Refuge lands in Vieques, Puerto Rico.

Our public lands are critical safe havens for imperiled wildlife. And, the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge is no exception. The Vieques refuge provides nesting beaches for endangered sea turtles as well as habitat for 190 types of birds and fourteen endangered species. These creatures all benefit from the many protections that come from being a part of America’s National Wildlife Refuge System—the only system of federal lands dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation. Because it is a National Wildlife Refuge, managers of Vieques are required to maintain the biological integrity, diversity and environmental health of the lands. The refuge is subject to national refuge laws designed to ensure that wildlife is protected for all Americans and for future generations while also allowing for balanced use of refuge lands.

The land conveyance provision in the PROMESA legislation would take away these national safeguards for 3,100 acres of prime habitat on the Western portion of the island of Vieques. These lands would no longer be a part of a National Wildlife Refuge System that has successfully protected wildlife since 1903. As stewards of God’s earth we should be doing more to protect God’s creatures.

America’s public lands work to protect God’s creation and provide us access to places where we can play and pray. We ask you to oppose the Vieques NWR land conveyance in PROMESA and all similar efforts to give away or undermine America’s protected public lands.

Sincerely,

Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness
Creation Justice Ministries
Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)
Green Chalice (Disciples of Christ)
Franciscan Action Network
Jubilee USA Network
National Baptist Convention of America International
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society