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Testimony for
US Department of Energy Hearing
Wahluke School District
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My name is Mike Conley, I live in Moses Lake and work for Grant County Port District #3.

The Department of Energy and its predecessors have controlled over 66,000 acres of Grant County since the early 1940's. Most all of the economic benefits derived from the Manhattan Project and Hanford Nuclear Reservation have not reached into our county. The Tri-Cities of Richland, Kennewick & Pasco have built their economies around Hanford while Grant county has been ignored. Secretary of Energy Richardson's recent news conference stating that the North Slope (Wahluke Slope) would be leased to the US Fish & Wildlife Department for management as a Federal Wildlife Refuge continues the extension of current policy, whereby Grant County and its taxpayers get left out of the economic picture again. US Fish & Wildlife is not concerned with local input and in fact have been very uncooperative with the local citizens, we dread the thought of them and their bureaucratic attitudes towards our citizens.

The Governor for Washington State is concerned about economic development for rural Washington, to us our future growth is tied to the very same land that is now proposed for a Refuge. It would be one thing if this land had no development options, however if you would look at our area you would see a beautiful agriculture economy with a great variety of orchards, vineyards and row crops. The County and local organizations have adopted the Wahluke 2000 plan as the preferred development of the Slope. This plan calls for the land to be used for its highest and best use, some should be wildlife habitat, but some should be farmed. Representative Hastings recent bill #HR1031 calls for the National Academy of Sciences to study the area. As an impartial body it should be able to objectively determine what this land is best suited for and we would urge that this bill be passed.

We understand that PILT payments are discretionary and appreciate that we finally received some in 1996 from the Energy Department. This was after federal control of over 50 years! We really support development of the farmable lands on the Wahluke Slope and would hope that could come on the TAX ROLES as private property, which would give an additional boost to the local economy. However, if the DOE moves forward with its announced plans the PILT payment program needs to be addressed for opportunities lost to the local economy. Based on the Grant County Assessor's current calculations, the developed farm land in the area has a value of \$3,091.67/acre. If this figure was applied to half of the Wahluke Slope lands in Grant County that value would be : $\$3,091.67 \times 33,000 \text{ acres} = \$102,025,000$ as compared to \$50,403,000 what the current PILT payment is based on. This needs to be addressed if current plans stay in place. In closing, Grant County citizens have received the short end of Hanfords economic benefits since the very beginning, please do not continue the same practice in the future, let us develop a portion of this land.

cc; Senators Murray & Gorton & Congressman Hastings