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NAIOP CONTACT: L. Caitlin Smith
(703) 904-7100 Ext. 162
smith@naiop.org

WSSI CONTACT: Laura J. Williams
(703) 631-5800 Ext. 142
lwilliams@wetlandstudies.com

NAIOP TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS ON WETLANDS
MITIGATION BANKING: A TOOL FOR PROTECTING THE NATION'S AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS

WASHINGTON DC (September 20, 2001) – Michael Rolband, P.E., P.W.S., of Chantilly, VA, testified before Congress today on behalf of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties (NAIOP) to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee’s Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Environment. The focus of the hearing was “H.R. 1474 – The American Wetlands Restoration Act.” Introduced by Congressman Walter Jones (R-NC), H.R. 1474 is the latest bill regarding this issue, which has been evolving since the early 1990s.

“From the various experiences of NAIOP members, including myself, we have concluded that a national wetlands mitigation banking program would provide many benefits to the natural systems, and help facilitate more formalized mitigation,” noted Rolband, who is President of Wetlands Studies and Solutions, Inc. (WSSI), a development consulting firm that deals primarily with projects involving wetlands, the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, Environmental Quality Corridors, stream restoration, floodplain studies, and stormwater quality and quantity control.

“The ecological and societal benefits of wetlands banking clearly surpass most alternative forms of providing compensation for wetlands losses,” said Rolband. “At WSSI, our largest mitigation users have

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been the highway department, local governments, airports, and school boards. Our experience has consistently proven that mitigation banking provides significant public benefits in addition to perpetually preserved open spaces.”

NAIOP is the nation’s leading organization of developers, investors, and owners of commercial real estate. Its more than 10,000 national members have a keen interest in legislative efforts aimed at protecting wetlands while providing alternative means to on-site mitigation, which is why the Association was invited to testify. “Wetlands mitigation banking provides the opportunity for developers to leverage their financial resources so that the ecological benefit of wetlands enhancement and preservation is greater in total than any one individual mitigation effort,” Rolband told the committee. “Time after time wetlands banks have been found to be more cost effective than individual projects. However, it is only by organizing these efforts—and providing published guidelines and methods—that we can positively ensure long-term viability and success.”

Rolband also observed that the combination of mitigation banks with regional stormwater programs would be an extremely effective method for rolling out a national scale project. “Having those two projects together would provide an important way to mitigate and provide long-term benefits, as well as be consistent with the watershed management initiatives being proposed in many of the most important river systems in the country.”

Wetlands mitigation banking is an extremely useful and creative tool to protect our fragile aquatic resources. NAIOP members support legislation that provides reasonable assurances for success of the chartered mitigation banks, and calls for annual reports that provide monitoring and seasonal data that are associated with the hydrology, vegetation, and other wetland functions. “This type of data would be invaluable to future mitigation bankers,” said Rolband, “since it would allow us to learn and grow in our approach.”

“For that reason, NAIOP supports H.R. 1474,” Rolband concluded to the committee. “We encourage Congress to enact this important legislation.”

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NAIOP is a national trade association that represents the interests of developers and owners of industrial, office and related commercial real estate throughout North America. Nearly 10,000 members strong, NAIOP provides government relations, communication, networking and business opportunities for all commercial real estate related professionals, offers a forum for continuing education, and promotes effective public policy through its grassroots network of 46 individual chapters. For more information on NAIOP visit www.naiop.org.

WSSI provides wetlands consulting on over 60,000 acres in 1100 sites in Northern Virginia, D.C. and Maryland and has created over 600 acres of wetlands in three wetlands banks and 45 stream and wetlands mitigation projects in this area since its inception in 1991. Its team of thirty engineers, scientists, technicians, GIS/survey specialists and administrative staff take a holistic approach to environmental issues associated with real estate development, integrating the practical constraints of economics and land plan requirements with the need to satisfy local, state, and federal regulatory requirements. For more information, contact (703) 631-5800 or visit their web site at www.wetlandstudies.com.

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