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SENATOR CARDIN INTRODUCES BILL TO FUND GREATER NUTRIA ERADICATION EFFORT

WASHINGTON – **U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin** (D-MD) today introduced bipartisan legislation to expand nutria eradication efforts in Maryland and Louisiana and to begin eradication programs in four additional coastal states. **Senator David Vitter** (R-LA) is the lead Republican co-sponsor of the measure.

The nutria is a large, semi-aquatic rodent that has often been described as “an eating machine” and can eat up to 25 percent of its body weight in plants per day. The nutria is a high-reproductive species that has devastated wetlands in Maryland, Louisiana and other coastal states, turning them into barren mud flats that cannot be re-vegetated.

“I have seen first-hand the damage done by nutria to the wetlands on the Eastern Shore, particularly at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge,” said **Senator Cardin**, a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. “A strong nutria eradication program is critical to protecting our wetlands from this invasive species that has such a destructive capability.”

“It’s well known that Louisiana has a serious and significant nutria problem. The nutria’s feeding habits are particularly damaging to wetlands, which is of serious concern to Louisiana, given the important role that wetlands play in hurricane protection. This bill will help fund a program that will help cull nutria populations across the country and reduce their impact on the environment,” said **Senator Vitter**.

It is estimated that nutria have destroyed 5,000 acres of marshland on the Eastern Shore’s Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. The destruction of the wetlands by nutria is costing the Maryland economy \$4 million a year from degradation of agricultural land adjacent to the Refuge. In 2000, the federally-funded Maryland Nutria Project launched and it has helped eradicate nutria from 150,000 acres in Dorchester, Wicomico, Somerset, Talbot and Caroline counties.

The legislation would authorize \$4 million a year over five years for eradication efforts in Maryland and Louisiana and \$1 million a year for coastal states, which include Delaware,

Virginia, Oregon and Washington. Also co-sponsoring the bill are Senators Barbara A. Mikulski (D-MD), Mary L. Landreiu (D-LA) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR).

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