

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 7221

To provide for the conservation and designation of habitat connectivity areas, with support from the voluntary conservation programs administered by the Secretary of Agriculture, as American wildlife corridors, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 5, 2024

Mr. BEYER (for himself and Mr. BUCHANAN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Agriculture, and in addition to the Committee on Natural Resources, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To provide for the conservation and designation of habitat connectivity areas, with support from the voluntary conservation programs administered by the Secretary of Agriculture, as American wildlife corridors, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Wildlife Corridors and
5 USDA Conservation Programs Act of 2024”.

1 **SEC. 2. HABITAT CONNECTIVITY AREA DESIGNATION.**

2 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

3 (1) AMERICAN WILDLIFE CORRIDOR.—The term
4 “American wildlife corridor” means land identified,
5 under subsection (b)(1), as a habitat connectivity
6 area within a covered land, including any land adja-
7 cent to such identified habitat connectivity area, des-
8 ignated under subsection (c).

9 (2) COVERED LAND.—The term “covered land”
10 means land that is enrolled under, or otherwise re-
11 lated to, a conservation program that is adminis-
12 tered by the Secretary.

13 (3) COVERED PRODUCER.—The term “covered
14 producer” means an owner, operator, or producer of
15 a covered land that has an American wildlife cor-
16 ridor on such covered land.

17 (4) DIRECTORS.—The term “Directors” means
18 the Secretary of the Interior acting through—

19 (A) the Director of the United States Geo-
20 logical Survey; and

21 (B) the Director of the United Fish and
22 Wildlife Service.

23 (5) HABITAT CONNECTIVITY.—The term “habi-
24 tat connectivity” means the degree to which land-
25 scapes, waterscapes, and seascapes allow species to
26 move freely, including during seasonal migration and

1 in response to changing environmental conditions,
2 and ecological processes to function unimpeded.

3 (6) HABITAT CONNECTIVITY AREA.—The term
4 “habitat connectivity area” means an area of intact
5 habitat or a distinct component of the landscape,
6 waterscape, or seascape the designation of which,
7 under subsection (c)(2), may provide habitat
8 connectivity.

9 (7) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
10 the Secretary of Agriculture.

11 (b) IDENTIFICATION OF HABITAT CONNECTIVITY
12 AREAS.—

13 (1) IDENTIFICATION.—Not later than 1 year
14 after the date of enactment of this Act, and periodi-
15 cally thereafter, the Secretary, in collaboration with
16 the Directors, shall identify habitat connectivity
17 areas within covered lands, including any lands adja-
18 cent to such identified habitat connectivity areas
19 that may provide additional habitat connectivity.

20 (2) MAPS.—Subject to section 1244(b) of the
21 Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3844(b)), as
22 amended by section 3 of this Act, upon identifying
23 habitat connectivity areas under paragraph (1), the
24 Secretary, in collaboration with the Directors,
25 shall—

1 (A) develop maps of—

2 (i) the identified habitat connectivity
3 areas, including any adjacent lands de-
4 scribed in paragraph (1); and

5 (ii) the covered land containing any
6 identified habitat connectivity areas; and

7 (B) expand and build upon any existing ef-
8 forts by the Department of Agriculture in devel-
9 oping such maps.

10 (3) REPORT.—Not later than 1 year after the
11 date on which the Secretary identifies habitat
12 connectivity areas under paragraph (1), and periodi-
13 cally thereafter upon any new such identifications,
14 the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report
15 that—

16 (A) includes a description of habitat
17 connectivity areas identified under paragraph
18 (1);

19 (B) includes a review of any associated
20 data or surveys related to activities carried out
21 under paragraph (1);

22 (C) includes the maps developed under
23 paragraph (2) in aggregate form; and

1 (D) identifies gaps in information with re-
2 spect to carrying out paragraphs (1) and (2),
3 including—

4 (i) information relating to whether the
5 identified habitat connectivity areas are
6 being used as a wildlife corridor;

7 (ii) additional information required to
8 identify additional habitat connectivity
9 areas; and

10 (iii) any other information the Sec-
11 retary, in collaboration with the Directors,
12 determines necessary.

13 (c) DESIGNATION OF AMERICAN WILDLIFE COR-
14 RIDORS.—

15 (1) CRITERIA.—Not later than 1 year after the
16 date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall
17 issue regulations to establish criteria, for the pur-
18 pose of designating habitat connectivity areas under
19 paragraph (2), that—

20 (A) considers whether a designation is in
21 concert with existing land and resource man-
22 agement plans of the applicable covered land;
23 and

24 (B) determines, using the best-available
25 science, whether a habitat connectivity area

1 identified under subsection (b)(1), including any
2 adjacent lands as described in that subsection—

3 (i) supports the persistence, resilience,
4 adaptability, and movement of fish and
5 wildlife;

6 (ii) has the potential to benefit more
7 than 1 species of fish and wildlife; or

8 (iii) has the potential to benefit fish
9 or wildlife species that is listed as threat-
10 ened or endangered under the Endangered
11 Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et
12 seq.).

13 (2) DESIGNATION.—Not later than 3 years
14 after the date on which the Secretary establishes cri-
15 teria pursuant to paragraph (1), the Secretary shall
16 designate habitat connectivity areas identified under
17 subsection (b)(1), including any adjacent lands that
18 may provide additional habitat connectivity, using
19 the criteria established pursuant to paragraph (1),
20 as an American wildlife corridor for the purposes of
21 encouraging the long-term maintenance and con-
22 servation of the American wildlife corridor.

23 (d) CONSERVATION OF AMERICAN WILDLIFE COR-
24 RIDORS.—

25 (1) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—

1 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, in col-
2 laboration with the Directors, shall develop and
3 establish technical standards and requirements,
4 including best practices for the long-term con-
5 servation of an American wildlife corridor, to
6 provide technical assistance, outreach, and edu-
7 cation to covered producers with respect to the
8 conservation of the applicable American wildlife
9 corridor.

10 (B) AUTHORIZED ACTIONS OF SEC-
11 RETARY.—In providing technical assistance
12 under paragraph (1)(B), the Secretary may en-
13 courage a covered producer to—

14 (i) implement strategies and activities
15 that will provide sustainable production
16 and conservation of wildlife habitats con-
17 currently on covered land;

18 (ii) maintain or improve habitats and
19 habitat connectivity in American wildlife
20 corridors on covered land;

21 (iii) establish wildlife monitoring
22 plans; and

23 (iv) implement strategies and activi-
24 ties that enhance the ability of fish and

1 wildlife to respond to changing environ-
2 mental conditions.

3 (2) CONTRACT MODIFICATION.—In furthering
4 the purposes of an American wildlife corridor des-
5 ignation under subsection (c)(2), the Secretary may,
6 with respect to a contract entered into with a cov-
7 ered producer relating to an American wildlife cor-
8 ridor on a covered land of such covered producer—

9 (A) give priority for reenrollment in the
10 conservation program administered by the Sec-
11 retary of such covered land; and

12 (B) terminate or modify such contract if—

13 (i) the covered producer agrees to the
14 termination or modification of such con-
15 tract; and

16 (ii) such covered land is enrolled in—

17 (I) the agricultural conservation
18 easement program established under
19 section 1265 of the Food Security Act
20 of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3865); or

21 (II) the healthy forests reserve
22 program established under section
23 501 of the Healthy Forests Restora-
24 tion Act of 2003 (16 U.S.C. 6571).

1 (e) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.—To carry out this
2 section, the Secretary may enter into cooperative agree-
3 ments with—

- 4 (1) Federal agencies;
- 5 (2) State, Tribal, and local governments;
- 6 (3) nongovernmental organizations; or
- 7 (4) academic institutions.

8 **SEC. 3. ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS.**

9 (a) PRIVACY OF PERSONAL INFORMATION RELATING
10 TO NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION PROGRAMS.—
11 Section 1244(b)(1)(B)(i) of the Food Security Act of 1985
12 (16 U.S.C. 3844(b)(1)(B)(i)) is amended by inserting “,
13 including the Wildlife Corridors and USDA Conservation
14 Programs Act of 2024” after “Farm Service Agency”.

15 (b) REGULATORY CERTAINTY.—Section 1244(p) of
16 the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3844(p)) is
17 amended—

- 18 (1) in paragraph (1)(B), by inserting “, or an
19 American wildlife corridor (as such term is defined
20 by section 2(a) of the Wildlife Corridors and USDA
21 Conservation Programs Act of 2024),” after “wild-
22 life resource concern”; and

1 (2) in paragraph (2)(A), by inserting “, or an
2 American wildlife corridor,” after “wildlife resource
3 concern”.

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