

**H.R. 839, H.R. 1809, H.R. 2293,
AND H.R. 2316**

LEGISLATIVE HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, WILDLIFE AND
FISHERIES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Serial No. 119-17

Printed for the use of the Committee on Natural Resources



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.govinfo.gov>

or

Committee address: <http://naturalresources.house.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

60-068 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
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CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members

From: Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries staff: Annick Miller, (annick.miller@mail.house.gov), Doug Levine (doug.levine@mail.house.gov), Kirby Struhar (kirby.struhar@mail.house.gov), and Thomas Shipman (thomas.shipman@mail.house.gov) x58331

Date: April 7, 2025

Subject: Legislative Hearing on **H.R. 839, H.R. 1809, H.R. 2293, and H.R. 2316**

The Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will hold a legislative hearing on H.R. 839 (Rep. Arrington), to prohibit the implementation of a Land Protection Plan at Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge; H.R. 1809 (Rep. Quigley), "*Great Lakes Fisheries Research Reauthorization Act*"; H.R. 2293 (Rep. Ezell) "*Cormorant Relief Act of 2025*"; and H.R. 2316 (Rep. Hurd), "*Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025*" on **Tuesday, April 8, 2025, at 10:15 a.m. (EDT) in 1324 Longworth House Office Building.**

Member offices are requested to notify Jackson Renfro (jackson.renfro@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, April 7, 2025, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- House Republicans are holding a hearing on three bills that promote good stewardship of taxpayer dollars and sound management of vital wildlife habitats.
- H.R. 839 would properly steward taxpayer dollars by preventing the potential one-hundred-fold expansion of the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. At a time when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has billions of dollars in deferred maintenance, the agency should focus on caring for the lands it currently manages rather than expanding the federal estate.
- H.R. 2293 would provide necessary relief to fish farmers who are experiencing severe depredation impacts due to predatory double-crested cormorants.
- H.R. 2316 would ensure the North American Wetlands Conservation Act continues to be properly resourced and conserve millions of acres of vital waterfowl habitat around the nation.

II. WITNESSES

Panel I

- Members of Congress TBD

Panel II

- **Mr. Bryan Baker**, President, Board of Directors for Texas Producers Cooperative, Sudan, Texas [H.R. 839]
- **Mr. Chris McGlawn**, President, Delta Cat Fisheries, Swiftown, Mississippi [H.R. 2293]

- **Mr. Mikk Anderson**, Board Member and Colorado Volunteer State Policy Chair, Ducks Unlimited, Aurora, Colorado [H.R. 2316]
- **Mr. John Roley**, Landowner, Lubbock County, Lubbock, Texas [H.R. 839] (*Minority Witness*)

III. BACKGROUND

H.R. 839, (Rep. Arrington, R-TX), To prohibit the implementation of a Land Protection Plan for Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge.

The National Wildlife Refuge System (System) is a network of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) administered lands, submerged lands, and waters that provide habitat for fish and wildlife resources across the United States and U.S. territories.¹ The System is made up of 571 national wildlife refuges (refuges), 38 wetland management districts, five marine national monuments, and 63 refuges with wilderness areas.² These units comprise nearly 900 million acres, with over 90 million acres of refuges located within the 50 states and the remaining acreage located within the U.S. territories and insular areas.³ The System currently has a deferred maintenance backlog of \$2.65 billion.⁴

H.R. 839 would prohibit the implementation, administration, and enforcement of the finalized land management plan for the Muleshoe (Muleshoe) National Wildlife Refuge. On April 16, 2024, the Service announced the expansion of four refuges to “conserve habitat, protect species and support recreation,” as part of the Biden administration’s 30 by 30 initiative, part of a radical environmental agenda that seeks to lock up American lands and waters.⁵ Among the refuges included in the expansions was Muleshoe, which currently comprises 6,440 acres of land along the West Texas and Eastern New Mexico border. The refuge was established in 1935 and according to the Service, “is best known for hosting one of the largest concentrations of sandhill cranes in North America.”⁶ The proposed expansion would allow the refuge to purchase up to 700,000 acres of additional private lands from willing sellers, growing the refuge to more than 100 times its current size.⁷



Picture 1 Sandhill Cranes at Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge Source: KUNM

Under Service regulations for expanding a refuge, they must first finalize a land protection plan.⁸ This land protection plan includes provisions such as the reasons for expanding the refuge and an Endangered Species Act Section 7 analysis. Also included is an expansion area from which land can be purchased. In the case of Muleshoe, the finalized land protection plan includes an acquisition boundary of 7 million acres, the goal of which is to acquire 700,000 of those acres.⁹ The method of purchase by the Service to accomplish the goal of acquiring 700,000 acres would be by purchasing property outright and adding to the federal estate or by using conservation easements to restrict land uses on private property.

The potential addition of 700,000 acres of federal land will have direct impacts on the areas surrounding Muleshoe. As with any federal land acquisition, local tax

revenues will be impacted, as lands under the ownership of the federal government are not taxable. The Service is required to help offset the loss in local tax revenue by making payments to counties that equate to either 25 percent of the net receipts of timber sales and grazing leases on the refuge or 0.75 percent of the adjusted purchase price of refuge lands.¹⁰ It is also unclear how the Service plans to manage lands acquired to expand Muleshoe, given the existing maintenance backlog currently facing the System.

Several counties within the expansion area have passed resolutions opposing the Service's decision, these include Lamb and Parmer Counties in Texas, and Roosevelt, Lea and Chaves Counties in New Mexico.¹¹

H.R. 2293, (Rep. Ezell, R-MS), “Cormorant Relief Act of 2025”

Double-crested cormorants (cormorants) are one of six cormorant species that are native to North America, with their largest concentration being in the Great Lakes region. Cormorants were listed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) in 1972, as the abundance of the species had decreased considerably due to the use of chemicals such as dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT).¹² Today, however, the Service estimates the population of cormorants in the continental U.S. and Canada to be between 871,001 and 1,031,757 birds.¹³

Cormorants' diet consists mostly of fish, eating on average a pound of fish per day. According to the Service, “[t]hey are opportunistic and generalist feeders, preying on many species of fish by concentrating on those that are easiest to catch.”¹⁴ This can make commercial aquaculture facilities optimal feeding grounds for cormorants, causing significant damage and economic harm to these facilities. According to a 2021 study, economic losses to fish farms from cormorants are estimated to be \$64.7 million per year, including the cost of non-lethal management techniques, and the revenue lost from cormorant depredation.¹⁵



Picture 2 Double-crested cormorant eating a fish
Source: National Audubon Society

In 1998, the Service created an Aquaculture Depredation Order (Aquaculture Order) under the authorities provided in the MBTA.¹⁶ The Aquaculture Order allowed the Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services to work with fish farmers to implement non-lethal and lethal techniques to prevent cormorants from eating fish in commercial aquaculture ponds. Fish farmers were required to report the number of cormorants killed each year. The intent of the Aquaculture Order was to reduce administrative costs for the Service and provide more timely relief for fish farmers. The Aquaculture Order was renewed three times, in 2003, 2009, and 2014 for five-year increments.¹⁷

In 2003, the Service also issued a Public Resource Depredation Order (Public Order), which was intended to reduce the risks to public resources from cormorants through both lethal and non-lethal means.¹⁸ The Public Order was renewed three times, in 2003, 2008, and 2014,¹⁹ with its 2014 renewal triggering a lawsuit from the organization Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) on the grounds that the renewal violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).²⁰

The Aquaculture Order was also challenged in PEER's lawsuit. On May 25, 2016, Judge John D. Bates of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ruled in PEER's favor, concluding the Service violated NEPA by reissuing the Public Order without an adequate Environmental Assessment (EA). Judge Bates also vacated the Aquaculture Order for not having an adequate EA.²¹

With the removal of the Aquaculture and Public Orders, the Service created an individual permit system based on a Population Take Limit (PTL) model. The PTL model is based upon nest counts and currently allows an annual take of up to 121,504 cormorants.²² When the Service issues a permit to take a cormorant, it indicates the number of cormorants allowed to be taken under that permit.

H.R. 2316 (Rep. Hurd, R-CO), "Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025"

The Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson), enacted in 1937, distributes federal aid to all 50 states and 5 U.S. territories to carry out wildlife restoration, conservation, and hunter education and safety programs. Revenue for Pittman-Robertson is generated through an excise tax on all firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment.²³ The Service administers Pittman-Robertson and allocates funding through three programs: the Wildlife Restoration Program, the Basic Hunter Education and Safety Program, and the Enhanced Hunter Education and Safety Program. The Wildlife Restoration Program aids in funding state fish and wildlife programs and allocates funding for projects that restore, conserve, and enhance native habitats. Through this program states may use funding to purchase, restore, manage, and facilitate public access to wildlife areas.²⁴ The formula used for apportionment to each state is one-third based on the total land area of the state and two-thirds based on the population of each state.²⁵

H.R. 2316 extends the period in which the interest accrued on unallocated Pittman-Robertson funds can be used to supplement congressional appropriations to the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). This provision is set to expire on September 30, 2025.²⁶ Without reauthorization of this provision, the interest would be distributed to states and territories under the current Pittman-Robertson apportionment formula. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, which represents the states, is supportive of H.R. 2316.²⁷

NAWCA provides grants to projects that conserve wetland habitats critical for migratory birds in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. According to the Service, over its nearly 40-year history NAWCA has benefited nearly 34 million acres of wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl through 3,300 individual projects.²⁸ This success is why Congress reauthorized NAWCA as a part of the America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Reauthorization Act in December 2024.²⁹



Picture 3 Waterfowl in flood timber Source: Ducks Unlimited

H.R. 1809 (Rep. Quigley, D-IL), "Great Lakes Fishery Research Reauthorization Act"

On December 20, 2019, President Trump signed the consolidated appropriations bill for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020.³⁰ Included in this law was an authorization for the Director of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to establish the Great Lakes Fishery Research Program (program).³¹ This program was established to conduct "monitoring, assessment, science, and research, in support of the binational fisheries within the Great Lakes Basin."³² In authorizing this program, Congress found that to support the diverse ecosystem and economic engine of the Great Lakes, fisheries management and research requires sound science and new technologies.³³ The program carries out research, monitoring, and assessment of

issues like fish movement and behavior, deepwater ecosystem science, fish habitat investigations, invasive species science, and how to leverage existing and new technology, vessels, and other scientific tools to help inform and serve fisheries managers.³⁴

Fish in the Great Lakes region do not observe borders between the two nations, which is why USGS partners with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) to carry out this program.³⁵ The GLFC was first established in 1957 and facilitates management of the Great Lakes between the United States and Canada.³⁶ An example of research carried under the program is USGS's extensive work to support the management the invasive sea lamprey,³⁷ which has been present in the Great Lakes for decades. The program provides technical assistance, research into technology to control this invasive species, and assists with regulatory affairs.³⁸ The science gained by this research is used to support the tribal, commercial, and recreational fisheries in the Great Lakes region. The latest studies estimate the economic value of the Great Lakes fishery to be more than \$7 billion annually and show that it supports upwards of 75,000 jobs.³⁹

P.L. 116–94 authorized this program through FY 2025 at \$15 million per year. H.R. 1809 would extend the authorization of this program for another five years, until FY 2030, at existing authorization levels.

IV. MAJOR PROVISIONS & ANALYSIS

H.R. 839 (Rep. Arrington, R-TX), To prohibit the implementation of a Land Protection Plan for Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge.

- Prohibits the implementation of the 2024 Land Protection Plan for the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge.

H.R. 1809 (Rep. Quigley, D-IL), “Great Lakes Fishery Research Reauthorization Act”

- Reauthorizes the Great Lakes Fishery Research program at currently authorized funding levels.

H.R. 2293 (Rep. Ezell, R-MS), “Cormorant Relief Act of 2025”

- Requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reinstate the Aquaculture Depredation Order for double-crested cormorants.
- Adds additional states to the order and adds definitions for “Lake Manager” and “Pond Manager.”

H.R. 2316 (Rep. Hurd, R-CO), “Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025”

- Extends the authorization to direct the interest accrued on unallocated Pittman Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act funds to the North American Wetlands Conservation Act to 2033.

V. EFFECT ON CURRENT LAW

H.R. 1809

H.R. 2316

- ¹ “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: An Overview,” Christopher R. Field, Congressional Research Service, 7/20/18, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45265>
- ² “Visit a National Wildlife Refuge Facility,” U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, <https://www.fws.gov/visit-us>
- ³ “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: An Overview,” Christopher R. Field, Congressional Research Service, 7/20/18, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45265>
- ⁴ “FY 2025 Budget Justification,” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2024, Page NWRS-35, https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2024-03/fy2025-508-fws-greenbook_revised-nex-4.pdf
- ⁵ “Interior Department Announces Expansion of Four National Wildlife Refuges to Conserve Habitat, Protect Species and Support Recreation,” Marilyn Kitchell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4/16/2024, <https://www.fws.gov/press-release/2024-04/expansion-4-national-wildlife-refuges-conserva-habitat-protect-species>
- ⁶ “Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge,” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/muleshoe/about-us>
- ⁷ “Final Land Protection Plan & Environmental Assessment,” *Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, February 2023, <https://iris.fws.gov/APPS/ServCat/DownloadFile/232579>
- ⁸ 602 F.W.2
- ⁹ “Final Land Protection Plan & Environmental Assessment,” *Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, February 2023, <https://iris.fws.gov/APPS/ServCat/DownloadFile/232579>
- ¹⁰ 16 U.S.C. 715s
- ¹¹ “Muleshoe Wildlife Refuge Update,” American Stewards for Liberty, 9/13/2024, <https://americanstewards.us/muleshoe-wildlife-refuge-update/>
- ¹² “Expanding Management of Conflicts Associated with Double-crested Cormorants,” *Frequently Asked Questions*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, <https://www.fws.gov/node/417891>
- ¹³ “Expanding Management of Conflicts Associated with Double-crested Cormorants,” *Frequently Asked Questions*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, <https://www.fws.gov/node/417891>
- ¹⁴ *Id.*
- ¹⁵ Engle CR, Christie TW, Dorr BS, et al. Principal economic effects of cormorant predation on catfish farms. *J World Aquacult Soc.* 2021;52:41–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jwas.12728>
- ¹⁶ 50 CFR 21.47
- ¹⁷ 79 FR 12458
- ¹⁸ 50 CFR 21.48
- ¹⁹ 79 FR 12458
- ²⁰ Memorandum Opinion on Vacatur, *Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, et al., v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, et al.* 5/25/2016, § 26, 16, *Cormorant Court Ruling and Order.pdf*
- ²¹ *Id.*
- ²² “Expanding Management of Conflicts Associated with Double-crested Cormorants,” *Frequently Asked Questions*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, <https://www.fws.gov/node/417891>
- ²³ “The Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act,” Mark DeSantis, Pervaze Sheikh, Erin Ward, Congressional Research Service, 10/12/2022, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/1P12229>
- ²⁴ *Id.*
- ²⁵ “About State Wildlife Action Plans,” Origins of the State Wildlife Action Plans, University of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, https://seas.umich.edu/ecomet/swap/About_SWAPs.html
- ²⁶ 16 U.S.C. 669b
- ²⁷ “Support for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act,” Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Resolution 2024-05-10, https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/6117/2778/9800/Compilation_of_resolutions_2024.pdf
- ²⁸ “FY 2025 Budget Justification,” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2024, Page NAW-3, https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2024-03/fy2025-508-fws-greenbook_revised-nex-1.pdf
- ²⁹ P.L. 118-198
- ³⁰ P.L. 116-94
- ³¹ *Id.*
- ³² 16 U.S.C. 941(h)(1)
- ³³ 16 U.S.C. 941(h)(5)
- ³⁴ 16 U.S.C. 941(h)(3)(C)
- ³⁵ Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Great Lakes Fishery Commission Research: Science to Inform Management, <https://www.glfc.org/science-research.php>
- ³⁶ Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Established by treaty to protect our fishery, <https://www.glfc.org/about.php>
- ³⁷ Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Resources for Researchers, <https://www.glfc.org/science-resources-facilities.php>
- ³⁸ *Id.*
- ³⁹ Great Lakes Fishery Commission, The Great Lakes Fishery: A world-class resource! <https://www.glfc.org/the-fishery.php>

**LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON H.R. 839, TO
PROHIBIT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A
LAND PROTECTION PLAN FOR MULESHOE
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE; H.R. 1809,
GREAT LAKES FISHERY RESEARCH REAU-
THORIZATION ACT; H.R. 2293, CORMORANT
RELIEF ACT OF 2025; AND H.R. 2316, WET-
LANDS CONSERVATION AND ACCESS
IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2025**

**Tuesday, April 8, 2025
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:17 a.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Harriet Hageman [Chair of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Hageman, Radewagen, Webster, Walberg, Ezell, Crank, Hoyle, Dingell, Min, Gray, and Huffman.

Also present: Representatives Arrington, Hurd, and Quigley.

Ms. HAGEMAN. The Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will come to order.

Good morning, everyone. I want to welcome members, witnesses, and our guests in the audience to today's hearing.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

Under Committee rule 4(f), any oral opening statements and hearings are limited to the Chair and the Ranking Member. I therefore ask unanimous consent that all other members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that the Congressman from Texas, Mr. Arrington, and the Congressman from Colorado, Mr. Hurd, be allowed to participate in today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

We are here today to consider four legislative measures: H.R. 839, to prohibit the implementation of a land protection plan for Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge, sponsored by Representative Arrington of Texas; H.R. 1809, the Great Lakes Fishery Research Reauthorization Act, sponsored by Representative Quigley of Illinois; the Cormorant Relief Act of 2025, sponsored by Representative Ezell of Mississippi; and H.R. 2316, the Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act, sponsored by Representative Hurd of the State of Colorado.

I now recognize myself for a 5-minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. HARRIET HAGEMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WYOMING

Ms. HAGEMAN. Today the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will examine four bills that will foster good stewardship of taxpayer dollars, achieve better and more effective conservation outcomes, and provide necessary relief from predatory double-crested cormorants for aquacultural producers.

Our first bill, sponsored by Congressman Arrington of Texas, would prevent the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from implementing the Biden administration's land management plan for the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge in west Texas and eastern New Mexico. Under the auspices of the Biden administration's misguided 30x30 land grab initiative, the plan authorizes the Service to acquire up to 700,000 acres. This is more than a hundredfold increase in the size of the refuge that is currently 6,440 acres. If fully implemented, this one refuge would be larger than the entire land mass of the State of Rhode Island.

Importantly, the refuge system in this country currently has over \$2.6 billion in maintenance backlog needs. Yet, as is typical for Washington, D.C., rather than dedicating resources to address such maintenance needs, we had an administration that sought to make it exponentially worse by grabbing even more land under the Federal umbrella. Common sense says that, until this backlog is resolved, the Service should not increase its footprint by increasing the amount of land that it manages.

The second bill under consideration is the Cormorant Relief Act, offered by Congressman Ezell of Mississippi, which would require the Service to reinstate the aquaculture depredation order for double-crested cormorants. This order was in place from 1998 until 2016, when it was vacated by a judge in response to yet another lawsuit.

Double-crested cormorants are a water bird that are most common in the Great Lakes States and the southeast. They are opportunistic and intelligent predators. And to the surprise of absolutely no one, they often feed at aquaculture facilities where fish are easy to catch—a free lunch, so to speak. Through a variety of studies, it has been determined that predation from double-crested cormorants costs the aquaculture industry nearly \$65 million annually in economic losses.

The bill would streamline the permitting process to take double-crested cormorants while putting in place certain safeguards and accountability measures to ensure the species population health.

The third bill we are considering is the Wetland Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025, offered by Congressman Hurd of the State of Colorado. The bill would extend the requirement in the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act, transferring the interest payments from unallocated Pittman-Robertson funds to the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, or NAWCA. NAWCA is one of the most successful conservation programs administered by the Federal Government. Nearly 34 million acres of wetland habitat across North America for migratory waterfowl have benefited from NAWCA projects.

It is important to note that transferring the accrued interest does not take any money away from the Treasury. Under Pittman-Robertson these monies would have instead been allocated to States. The State fish and wildlife agencies through the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, however, are on record supporting this approach, further confirming its viability and effectiveness.

Our fourth bill is the Great Lakes Fishery Research Reauthorization Act, sponsored by Congressman Quigley from Illinois. This bill would reauthorize the Great Lakes Fishery Research Program which is administered by the U.S. Geological Survey, or USGS. This program works in concert with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to conduct research to support the binational fisheries within the Great Lakes Basin.

I will note that once again the minority has chosen to ignore their own member's legislation, choosing instead to identify a witness to oppose a Republican bill, rather than a witness to testify as to the value of the Democrat bill before us. This trend is not surprising. Less than half of the legislative hearings last Congress had a witness expressing support for a minority-sponsored bill.

With that I want to take the time to thank the witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to a robust conversation.

I now recognize Ranking Member Hoyle for her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. VAL HOYLE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF OREGON

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses that came here today.

Today's agenda includes four bills that address conservation efforts, wildlife management, and environmental research. Some take important steps forward, while others undermine science-based conservation and decision-making.

I also want to note that the Department of the Interior chose not to participate in today's hearing. This limits our ability to fully understand and assess the impact of these bills which also hurts our ability to make the best possible decisions.

H.R. 2293 restores a policy allowing unlimited removal of double-crested cormorants. This policy was previously overturned by a court. Americans deserve sensible tools that help them manage predators like the double-crested cormorant that threaten their livelihoods. These birds can cause problems for aquaculture producers, so producers need to have lethal and non-lethal options for managing them. However, I am not sure what problem we are solving for here, especially when we don't see evidence to say that the current permit system isn't working.

I will note again it is hard to talk about this issue without hearing from the Fish and Wildlife Service, which would be responsible for implementing this bill. I hope my colleagues will work with us to understand the agency's perspective on whether there is a problem here, and allow a discussion based on these facts and, if so, what an appropriate solution might be.

Next is H.R. 839, which blocks the gradual expansion of Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. The Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge had a public process to determine a new

boundary area where the Fish and Wildlife Service can purchase land from willing sellers. My concern is this bill blocks landowners in that area from selling land or applying for conservation easements.

It seems like government overreach to limit the ability of a private property owner to sell their private property just because it is for conservation purposes. I live across the street from land that was sold to the McKenzie River Land Trust to keep in conservation. The Siletz Tribe purchased 500 acres down the road from me to keep it in conservation and grow Indigenous plants. A willing buyer and a willing seller came to a deal. That is how it should be. Why should Congress weigh in and block that process? Again, I believe that is government overreach.

H.R. 1809, introduced by Representative Quigley, provides much-needed support to fisheries science by reauthorizing funding for the United States Geological Survey's Great Lakes Fishery Research Program to continue its research supporting sustainable fisheries management like identifying and combating invasive species like the Asian carp and sea lamprey, conducting surveys for sports fish management, and monitoring impacts of harmful algae blooms on fisheries resources. I hope we can move this legislation forward quickly to markup and then into law. It is bipartisan, and it is a good bill, it should pass.

Finally, H.R. 2316 extends the Interest Transfer Authority from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Fund to the North American Wetland Conservation Act Fund, helping to ensure that more resources are available for conservation efforts. NAWCA has strong bipartisan support. Since this program's inception, \$2.1 billion of NAWCA funding has resulted in over 4.3 billion additional investments in wetland conservation projects across almost 32 million acres of habitat. I support this bill and I would like to see it passed on the House floor.

I don't know what the Senate is going to do. We never know what the Senate is going to do.

I appreciate all of our witnesses here today who will help us understand the best ways to protect our wildlife, and why investing in conservation is crucial for all Americans. I look forward to the discussion.

And I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you very much. I will now introduce our first panel.

Oh, excuse me. There you are.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Good morning.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Good morning.

I now recognize Ranking Member Huffman for his opening statement. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. JARED HUFFMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you, Madam Chair. And Madam Chair, I think you know that Democrats would love to have an additional witness so that we could actually have our witnesses speak to both the bills we support and, unfortunately, the bills that we must oppose. But when we are limited to one witness, we are kind of stuck.

And so I would love it if you would go back to the practice that I did when I chaired this Committee, which was to reach out to the minority party and see if we could find some joint witnesses, where you wouldn't have to be jammed into this Hobson's choice. But until then, I guess we will have snarky comments about, you know, which witnesses the Democrats choose with their one lonely witness choice, and then I guess we will respond in kind by pointing out that the Republicans never want to call anyone from the administration to ever testify at their hearings, which is also a problem. But gosh, let's be better. Let's get beyond that kind of partisan stuff.

We have four bills on the agenda today, and I want to focus on H.R. 839, a bill that, unfortunately, would block a carefully developed, community-supported land protection plan from the Fish and Wildlife Service for the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge in west Texas. And before we hear a lot of overheated rhetoric about land grabs, let's set some facts here.

Fish and Wildlife Service cannot seize land. It cannot pressure landowners. It may only acquire land, water, or other interests from willing sellers. Full stop. There is no land grab. That is a fiction designed to stir outrage, not an honest reflection of reality.

But here we are. My Republican colleagues have brought another bill rooted in the same old hollow narrative, where every conservation effort is cast as a government overreach and a conspiracy where public lands are treated like some kind of a looming threat instead of an intergenerational legacy. And the truth is just different. Mule Shoe Land Protection Plan is a science-based, voluntary initiative that offers landowners a new tool to manage their property while supporting conservation, if they choose. It is the product of years of research, listening sessions, and direct engagement with the very people who live and work in the region.

And the plan doesn't restrict landowner rights. It expands them. It gives landowners a choice to conserve habitat for birds and wildlife, to be compensated for doing it, and to be part of something larger than their own fence lines. That is not a threat; it is a partnership, and it is exactly the kind of win-win conservation we should be lifting up, the kind that Republicans used to celebrate, and we shouldn't be tearing it down here today.

That is especially true considering that the southern High Plains ecosystem that Muleshoe aims to conserve is one of the most threatened on the planet. Let's be clear. This isn't just about one refuge. The bill is part of a broader campaign by fringe organizations like American Stewards of Liberty, groups that specialize in fearmongering, misinformation, and dismantling environmental protections under the guise of defending freedom. And I say to my colleagues and to the communities watching, don't fall for it.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest network of lands and waters dedicated to conserving wildlife. These refuges are not just lines on a map; they are vital sanctuaries for migratory birds, endangered species, entire ecosystems that sustain our air, water, and climate. And for millions of Americans they are right next door.

Our wildlife refuges are also economic engines. Refuges draw hunters, anglers, fishers, outdoor recreationalists, photographers,

bird watchers, and tourists. They support local businesses, generate a lot of rural jobs, and increase county revenues. Many even incorporate agriculture because conservation and working lands don't have to be at odds. And that is why national wildlife refuges have long enjoyed bipartisan support. They are shaped by local voices, managed with State and community input, and built on a model of collaboration that works. Muleshoe is no exception. There landowners, hunters, conservationists, and residents have come together to protect a fragile and vital landscape. We are going to hear from one of those voices today, and we should be honoring that success, not politicizing and dismantling it. We should be expanding staffing and investing in the future of these places so that Americans, more Americans, can hunt, hike, farm, and enjoy them.

So let's reject the fearmongering and the politics. Let's stand with communities, and let's do our part to preserve our Nation's special places for generations to come.

I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. I will now introduce our first panel.

As is typical with legislative hearings, the bills' sponsors are recognized for 5 minutes each to discuss their bills. I now recognize Congressman Ezell for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. MIKE EZELL, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Madam Chair.

For far too long catfish farmers in Mississippi, in the southeast region of the United States, have been plagued by the burden of permits and processes implemented by big government who bend the knee to radical environmental groups. These environmental groups are either unaware of how their policies affect the livelihood of everyday working-class Americans, or simply they just don't care.

The double-breasted cormorant is a nuisance, plain and simple. They eat up to a pound-and-a-half of fish a day, and even the Fish and Wildlife Service has classified them as opportunists and generalist feeders that prey on many species of fish. Still, farmers must jump through hoops to prevent these birds from eating their stock.

Aquaculture farmers have been struggling for years with the importation of non-domestic catfish. Now, because of one single liberal court ruling, our catfish community loses up to \$64 million annually. This loss is in addition to the burden of individual permits that is now in place of the national depredation order that existed for over a decade.

My bill, H.R. 2293, the Cormorant Relief Act of 2025, reinstates the aquaculture depredation order to double-crested cormorants. This is nothing new. It is the same order that was easily reinstated in 2003, 2009, and 2014.

Now, as a proud Mississippian, I am happy to welcome Mr. Chris McGlawn, an award-winning catfish farmer and the President of Catfish Farmers of Mississippi. Chris is a wonderful representation of the State of Mississippi and catfish farmers alike.

Chris, thank you for making the trip to Washington and speaking here today on behalf of this bill, and I will have some questions at my time.

And thank you, Madam Chairman, I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. I now recognize Congressman Hurd for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JEFF HURD, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF COLORADO**

Mr. HURD. Chairman Hageman, thank you very much for including my legislation, H.R. 2316, the Wetlands Conservation Access Improvement Act in today's hearing.

I also want to thank the Committee staff for their support, and my colleague, Representative Elfreh, for joining me in leading this important bipartisan effort.

H.R. 2316 is a straightforward, targeted update to the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act. This is a landmark 1937 law that channels excise tax revenue from firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment into wildlife restoration, conservation, and hunter education.

The bill simply extends the timeline for when the interest earned on these funds can be used to 2033, ensuring that more dollars will be available to support wetlands and waterfowl conservation projects through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. That interest has averaged nearly \$11 million a year since 2004, helping restore critical habitat and supporting healthy migratory bird populations across North America. This is a win for conservationists, and it is a win for sportsmen.

American sportsmen have long been among our Nation's greatest conservation advocates. This bill ensures their contributions continue to make a lasting impact on the lands and habitats that they care so deeply about.

In addition, Madam Chairwoman, I would ask for unanimous consent to enter a letter from the North American Wetlands Conservation Council and a letter signed by 13 sportsmen and conservation groups in support of my legislation into the record.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

March 31, 2025

Hon. Bruce Westerman, Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bruce Westerman,

Members of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council urge you to support legislation (H.R. 2316) that would allow the investment interest from the Pittman-Robertson Funds (P-R Funds) to continue to be used for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund (NAWCF).

As a part of the funding for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), the earned interest from the investment of P-R Funds is deposited into NAWCF annually. These funds are used in the normal grant-making process for NAWCA. During the past 10 years, the NAWCF has received an average of \$30 million per year in earned interest from the P-R Fund, though the actual amount fluctuates annually. This critical provision of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937 (Pittman-Robertson Act) must be reauthorized before it expires on September 30, 2025 (the sunset of the 10-year authorization).

Under the Pittman-Robertson Act, excise taxes collected on certain hunting equipment are deposited into the P-R Fund and are available, without further appropriation, to States. The Pittman-Robertson Act requires that interest earned

on balances in that fund be used to finance wetland conservation projects authorized under NAWCA. It is important to note because the interest earnings are spent without further appropriation, the Congressional Budget Office has historically determined that enacting this legislation would have no net effect on Federal spending and “scores” as revenue neutral. The interest from the P-R Funds, when matched by our growing list of partners, creates an additional \$60 million annually, for a total of \$90 million, in on-the-ground meaningful and measurable wetlands conservation. Unlike the yearly NAWCF appropriation, the Pittman-Robertson portion of the funding cannot be allocated without this important reauthorization. Furthermore, in 2024, the Association of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies passed a resolution supporting the continued flow of this interest into the NAWCF rather than to their states through the apportionment process.

Please find below signatures from non-federal Council members thanking you, in advance, for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

*Ms. Judith Camuso, Commissioner,
Maine Department of Inland
Fisheries and Wildlife*

*Mr. Mark W. Elsbree, Senior VP,
Western Region,
The Conservation Fund Wildlife*

*Ms. Wendy Jackson,
Land Trust Alliance*

*Mr. Marshall Johnson, Chief
Conservation Officer,
National Audubon Society*

*Mr. Ronald Leathers, Jr., Chief
Conservation Officer,
Pheasants Forever*

*Dr. Kelly Straka, Director Fish and
Wildlife, Minnesota Department of
Natural Resources*

*Dr. Karen Waldrop, Chief
Conservation Officer,
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.*

*Mr. Jeb Williams, Vice Chair and
Director, North Dakota Game and
Fish Department*

Mr. HURD. Thank you. I look forward to hearing from our witness, Mr. Anderson, today and working with all of you to advance this common-sense legislation through the Committee process.

And with that I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. I now recognize Congressman Quigley for 5 minutes.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. MIKE QUIGLEY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

Mr. QUIGLEY. Thank you for having me and for considering the bill, the Great Lakes Fishery Research Reauthorization Act.

First I would like to thank my colleague, Representative Bill Huizenga, for his work on this bill and other issues important to the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes are a natural wonder of the world in every sense: they contain 20 percent of the world’s fresh water; 40 million people in the U.S. and Canada rely on the Great Lakes for clean drinking water. But to get to the real issues at hand, we are here today to talk about the Great Lakes fisheries. The total value of commercial, recreational, and tribal fishing in the Great Lakes is

at least \$5 billion. The industry supports an estimated 75,000 jobs across the region.

Research into the Great Lakes fishery provides us with data and information necessary to manage fish populations, conduct habitat maintenance, roll out educational programs, and more. For the last 5 years this authorized program has provided funds for the U.S. Geological Survey and, more specifically, the Great Lakes Science Center to conduct scientific research and invest in new technology.

My bill is a flat reauthorization of this program at 15 million per year through 2030. Researchers across the region rely on this data collected over decades to analyze trends, and reauthorizing this program will allow the Great Lakes Science Center to continue its research and provide data sets that are stable and reliable into the future.

To underscore the importance of this program, I thought I would bring an illustration of the problem.

[Slide]

Mr. QUIGLEY. You may have noticed the poster behind me. This is a sea lamprey. If this graphic doesn't convince you that we don't want these suckers in the Great Lakes, I am not sure what will. Their suction cup clamps on to our native fish and feeds on them, kind of like a giant great leech. One sea lamprey can kill 40 pounds of Great Lakes fish over a 12 to 18-month feeding period. And that is just one of the threats that we are currently up against.

In the 1950s the U.S. and Canada established the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to shore up our shared fisheries. Decades of over-fishing, invasive species like the sea lamprey, and human impact on the lakes threatened the over 130 native species. There are over 20 fish species that have gone extinct in the Great Lakes over the last 2 centuries, and 61 species are currently threatened or endangered. For all those in the region who depend on the fishery for food, livelihood and sport, it is critical that we continue to monitor the Great Lakes and our native fish species.

Before this program was authorized 5 years ago, the USGS had pieced together funding from many different buckets to support this research. USGS and the Great Lakes Science Center had lagged far behind their peers in introducing 21st century technology to properly and effectively monitor the lakes. This patchwork funding model led to instability in the research programs and pulled resources from other programs. The Great Lakes Science Center is the only agency that conducts multi-jurisdictional, lake-wide scientific assessments, and it is crucial to protect and preserve this incredible resource and economic driver.

The Great Lakes Science Center has field operations in five of the eight Great Lakes states. It owns and operates a fleet of large research vessels that monitor the lakes and the fishery to ensure these crucial ecosystems stay healthy and productive. This bipartisan bill is about supporting the science needed to protect, sustain, and improve the economically indispensable and ecologically unique Great Lakes fishery.

Madam Chair, it has been talked about, the conflicts we have and disagreements we have. But there are so many reasons that we need to maintain the fishery for economic reasons, job reasons, natural reasons. These are the common grounds that we need to

work with together, because they are important for reasons that we all care about. And I truly thank you for the time today.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, and thank you for joining us. These are important issues.

I now recognize Congressman Arrington for 5 minutes.

Thank you for joining us today.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JODEY ARRINGTON, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS**

Mr. ARRINGTON. I thank the Chairlady and Ranking Member for the opportunity to waive on to this Committee. I am a little out of breath because I am out of shape, for the record.

[Laughter.]

Mr. ARRINGTON. And we Ways and Means guys don't move around as much as you all do.

I am honored to be in the presence of two great men from west Texas, and to have a little slice of God's country right here in the Nation's capital. And so I give a hearty welcome to fourth-generation farmer, Mr. Bryan Baker and Mr. John Roley, who is a successful car dealer. Both of them love this country, both of them are proud, rural Americans, but they are on different sides of this issue, Madam Chair, and that is healthy. I mean, this is what this process is all for, robust debate and this democratic process.

But private property rights, I think we all would agree, is a cornerstone of our free society and central to the free enterprise system that has blessed our Nation with unparalleled prosperity. Here is my point, and here is my position on this for the people of west Texas who I represent, recognizing there are different views: the Federal Government, as my dad would put it, needs more public land like I need another hole in my head.

This 30x30 initiative, where we somehow think it is a good idea for the Federal Government to own a third of the land in these great United States, after all we have witnessed and experienced over the recent years where the levers of power in this city have been weaponized against landowners from the 1,500 miles of rivers because of some endangered species, where by now those waters are not able to be utilized for irrigation to feed and clothe American people. I have seen the Mexican mussel listed so that Texas couldn't put buoy barriers to defend itself when their Federal Government failed to do its job to provide for a common defense. I could go through a litany of grievances from Waters of the U.S. and down the line where the Federal Government infringed, I believe, on our liberties.

But as the Budget Chairman, we are \$36 trillion in debt. We have world war levels of indebtedness. We are \$2 trillion borrowing on the backs of our children every year, and we are paying now more in interest than we spend in all of national defense. And somehow we think we need to spend more money on behalf of the taxpayers to buy up more land that we don't manage. We don't manage the land we have well, Madam Chair, and that causes problems.

And so there are, as I said, a litany of reasons why I think it is a bad idea. I think our private property owners like Mr. Roley and everybody else should be able to buy whatever property they

want and transact how they please with their money. But I am a fiduciary of tax dollars on behalf of the United States citizens from every State in the Union, and I think it is tremendously wasteful and unnecessary to use it to buy up more Federal lands.

So that is my strong position. A 10,000 percent increase in a wildlife refuge on the plains of west Texas, 10,000 percent increase? Like a hole in our head.

I yield.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Arrington. I understand your position. I come from a State where 48 percent of the surface estate is owned by the Federal Government. Last year we had catastrophic forest fires, losing a total, between the forest fires and prairie fires, over 800,000 acres. We need a Federal Government that is more responsive and responsible in managing the resources they already have, not adding to that. So I appreciate your perspective here today.

I want to thank the members for your testimony, and I am now going to introduce our second panel.

Mr. Chris McGlawn, President of Delta Cat Fisheries in Greenwood, Mississippi.

Mr. John Roley, a landowner in Lubbock, Texas.

Mr. Bryan Baker, President of the Board of Directors for the Texas Producers Cooperative in Sudan, Texas.

And Mr. Mikk Anderson, a Board Member and Colorado Volunteer State Policy Chair of Ducks Unlimited in Aurora.

Let me remind the witnesses that, under Committee rules, they must limit their oral statements to 5 minutes, but their entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony please press the button on the microphone.

And we use timing lights. When you begin the light will turn green. When you have 1 minute left it will turn yellow, and at the end of the 5 minutes the light will turn red and I will ask you to please complete your statement.

I will also allow all witnesses to testify before the members begin their questions.

I now recognize Mr. McGlawn for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CHRIS MCGLAWN, PRESIDENT, DELTA CAT FISHERIES, GREENWOOD, MISSISSIPPI

Mr. MCGLAWN. Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 2293, the Cormorant Relief Act of 2025.

As a lifelong catfish farmer I have firsthand experience with the challenges faced by catfish farmers, particularly the economic and operational burden imposed by double-crested cormorants.

I also want to thank Representative Ezell, Representative Thompson, and the other sponsors of this bill for bringing forward this common-sense approach to helping fish farmers while also helping the Fish and Wildlife Service better manage healthy migratory bird population.

Our family catfish farm of 450 acres is located in Humphreys County, Mississippi. We are truly a family operation, with my wife

and my two children working along with me. It is more than just a job for us; it is our life. I can say with confidence that this is much of the same throughout the catfish country.

The current system of individual depredation permits is inefficient, costly, and fails to provide timely relief to farmers. Restoring the national depredation order would allow for better management of bird problems, reduce financial strain on both farmers and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Catfish farming is an economically intensive endeavor. This bill will restore a more efficient approach to managing bird depredation of fish farms.

Catfish farming is a capital-intensive industry, requiring significant investment in infrastructure, feed, labor, and disease management. The average cost of production for farm-raised catfish averages around \$1.10 a pound, depending on factors such as feed prices, water management, and labor costs. Feed alone accounts for 50 percent of total production cost. Additionally, labor cost, water quality management, disease prevention, and bird harassment create additional cost.

Despite these high costs, catfish farmers must compete in a volatile market where price fluctuates, import of seafood competition and regulatory hurdles impact profitability. The added burden of cormorant depredation further strains farm operations, making it imperative to implement cost-effective bird management strategies.

Beyond financial constraints, catfish farmers face numerous operational challenges. Maintaining optimum oxygen levels requires constant monitoring and investment both day and night. Rising commodity prices impact feed affordability, making cost reduction strategies essential.

And finally, bird depredation is a constant challenge on catfish farms, including my own. These birds can consume up to a pound-and-a-half of fish per day, which could be anywhere from 10 to 30 fish per day. Cormorants typically fly in large groups of 50 to 200 birds per flock. Without constant pressure and harassment, we could lose thousands of catfish in just a few short days. This leads to millions of dollars in both losses and increased costs associated with harassing birds annually.

In addition, disease outbreak spreads rapidly and are often complicated by wild bird activity on catfish farm. The average catfish farm spends \$285 per acre on harassment measures, including labor, vehicle expense, and infrastructure maintenance. The cost to the catfish industry related to the bird depredation can be as high as \$64 million annually.

Despite these efforts, harassment alone does not completely resolve the problem. Under the current system of individual permits, each catfish farmer is required to make an application to the Fish and Wildlife Service for an individual permit to take a certain number of cormorants. Fish and Wildlife Service must administer and approve or deny each application with varying numbers of take birds. This creates a patchwork of guessing by Fish and Wildlife Service, where the main problems will occur in a given year. For example, I might not have as much of a challenge with cormorants next year, but my neighbor a few miles down the road could be

covered up with birds. He won't have enough to take under his permit, while I have more than I need.

Individual permits also require unneeded inefficiencies for Fish and Wildlife Service in administering thousands of individual permits, as opposed to a national order which allows for the same monitoring and protection of the overall health of the cormorant population while allowing Fish and Wildlife Services to use limited resources in critical areas. Under a national depredation order, farmers are still required to keep track of take numbers, and Fish and Wildlife Service must work with USDA wildlife services to adequate population number of cormorants to ensure no harm comes to the overall health of the species.

It is important to note, as part of this application process, farmers are required to have in place an approved bird harassment plan. We rely on harassment techniques such as noise cannons, pyrotechnics, and constant patrol to deter cormorants. This will not change under our national depredation order. It will always be a last resort to take a problem bird.

More than 85 percent of U.S. seafood is imported. The seafood trade deficit is the \$25 billion annually. Domestic aquaculture needs all the assistance we can get. This bill does not have anything to do with trade, but it does fix an unneeded layer of regulation of U.S. catfish farmers. The Cormorant Relief Tax presents a common-sense solution to challenges faced by catfish farmers and other farmers throughout the U.S.

By restoring a national depredation order, producers can reduce operational costs, improve disease control, and enhance farm sustainability. I urge the Committee to support this legislation, ensure that farmers have the tools necessary to safeguard their livelihood and strengthen the U.S. seafood industry.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions from the Committee.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McGlawn follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHRIS MCGLAWN, PRESIDENT,
CATFISH FARMERS OF MISSISSIPPI

Introduction

Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 2293, The Cormorant Relief Act of 2025. I also want to thank Rep. Ezell, Rep. Thompson and the other sponsors of this bill for bringing forward this commonsense approach to helping fish farmers while also helping U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) better manage healthy migratory bird populations.

As a lifelong catfish farmer, I have firsthand experience with the challenges faced by catfish farmers, particularly the economic and operational burdens imposed by double-crested cormorants. Our family catfish farm of about 450 acres is located in LeFlore County, MS. We are truly a family operation with my wife and two children working together on the farm. It is more than a job for us, it is our life. I can say with confidence that this is much the same throughout catfish country.

The current system of individual depredation permits is inefficient and fails to provide timely relief to farmers. Restoring a national depredation order would allow for better management of problem birds, reducing financial strain on both farmers and the FWS. Catfish farming is an economically intensive endeavor. This bill would restore a more efficient approach to managing bird depredation on fish farms.

The Economic Realities and Challenges of Catfish Farming

Catfish farming is a capital-intensive industry, requiring significant investment in infrastructure, feed, labor, and disease management. The average cost of production

for farm-raised catfish averages around \$1.10 per pound or \$10,000 per water acre, depending on factors such as feed prices, water management, and labor costs.

Despite these high costs, catfish farmers must compete in a volatile market where price fluctuations, imported seafood competition, and regulatory hurdles impact profitability. The added burden of cormorant depredation further strains farm operations, making it imperative to implement cost-effective bird management strategies.

Beyond financial constraints, catfish farmers face numerous operational challenges. Maintaining optimal oxygen levels, pH balance, and ammonia control require constant monitoring and investment both day and night. Rising commodity prices impact feed affordability, making cost reduction strategies essential.

Bird depredation is a constant challenge and cost on catfish farms, including my own. These birds consume up to 1.5/lb. of fish or 10–30 fish per day. Cormorants fly in large groups of 50–200 birds per flock. Without constant pressure and harassment we can lose thousands of catfish in just a few short days. This leads to millions of dollars in both losses and increased costs associated with harassing birds annually. In addition, cormorants cause disease outbreaks on farms that spread rapidly and can wipe out an entire pond.

The average catfish farmer spends \$285 per acre on harassment measures, including labor, vehicle expenses, and infrastructure maintenance. The cost to the catfish industry related to bird depredation can be as high as \$65 million annually. Despite these efforts, harassment alone does not completely resolve the problem.

Individual Permits vs. National Order

Under the current system of individual permits, each catfish farmer is required to apply to FWS for an annual individual permit to take a certain number of cormorants. FWS must administer and approve or deny each application with varying take numbers, based in large part to previous year's data. This creates a patchwork of guessing by FWS on where the main problems will occur each year. For example, I might not have much of a challenge with cormorants next year but my neighbor a few miles away may experience constant bird pressure on his farm. He won't have enough take under his permit while I have much more than I need.

Individual permits also require unneeded inefficiencies for FWS in administering thousands of individual permits. A national order allows for the same monitoring and protection of the overall health of the cormorant population while targeting limited FWS resources in more critical areas. Under a depredation order, farmers are still required to keep accurate take numbers and FWS must work with USDA Wildlife Services to keep adequate population numbers for cormorants to ensure no harm comes to the overall health of the species.

It is important to note, as part of the application process, farmers are required to have in place an approved bird harassment plan. Farmers rely on harassment techniques such as noise cannons, pyrotechnics, and constant patrols to deter cormorants. This will not change under a depredation order. It is always a last resort to take problem birds.

A national depredation order would allow for targeted removal of problem birds, significantly reducing costs and improving management efficiency. By eliminating bureaucratic delays associated with individual permits, farmers could respond immediately to bird threats protecting their fish and reducing disease transmission that can create additional losses.

Conclusion

This bill is a win-win for both farmers and FWS. The Cormorant Relief Act presents a common-sense solution to the challenges faced by catfish farmers and other fish farmers throughout the U.S. By restoring a national depredation order, producers can reduce operational costs, improve disease control, and enhance farm sustainability. I urge the Committee to support this legislation, ensuring that farmers have the tools necessary to safeguard their livelihoods and strengthen the U.S. seafood industry.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions from the Committee.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, Mr. McGlawn. I now recognize Mr. Roley for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN ROLEY, LANDOWNER, LUBBOCK
COUNTY, LUBBOCK, TEXAS**

Mr. ROLEY. Madam Chair, Ms. Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity for allowing me to be here today. It is my honor.

My name is John Roley. I worked in the Littlefield, Texas area for more than 45 years. I was a successful car dealer, and I am an active rancher in the Littlefield area. I own 3,800 acres of land in Hockley, Bailey and Lamb County, Texas, and have always been a thoughtful steward of the land. For example, I was recently recognized as a Lone Star Land Steward for my work I have done on my Little Las Vegas property, where I have restored nearly 1,400 acres back to native habitats which have helped the local species flourish there. I have made efforts to make my land accessible for hunting and for educational activities.

My 2,200-acre Little Las Vegas Ranch sits on the eastern edge of the Yellow House Draw, an area described by Francisco Coronado in 1542 as the Casa Amarillas, due to the low yellow hills. The property is home to numerous quail, Texas horned lizards, mule deer, and whitetail deer. The property is grazed on an as-needed basis through our periodic droughts, and is leased for hunting.

The first 380 acres I acquired were planted back to native grasses and wildflowers with funds intended to help preserve the lesser prairie chicken population in the area. Since then, additional restoration of old crop lands have resulted in the establishment of more than 1,000 acres of native habitat across the landscape. In addition, the restoration of multiple playa lakes, or playa wetlands, on the property has enhanced its usability for ducks, cranes, geese, and migrating birds.

The ranch has undertaken multiple efforts to make the property more suitable for wildlife, and by allowing 4H groups access, Littlefield Independent School outdoor education opportunities, and an all women's and new hunter dove hunt. In addition, the ranch allows access for dove trapping and banding conducted by Texas Wildlife Department.

I am also a Republican, a strong, staunch advocate of private property rights. In my mind no one, and particularly not the Federal Government, should have the right to tell me what property I can sell or cannot sell. It is a fundamental part of our rights in America to retain freedom to do with the land as we see fit. Whether it is I sell it for conservation or development, landowners should be free to use or develop their property as they see fit and should not be told by another party that I may sell or give an interest in my land if I so choose. That is important to me, being an American, being what American is all about. And frankly, it is why I am here today to oppose H.R. 839 that would prohibit the implementation of the land protection plan for the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge.

After going through a public process and consulting with partners nearly a year ago, the Service released its final findings. The updated plan made for a significantly larger boundary for the Service, aiming to conserve 700,000 acres. This broad landscape approach enables the Service to work with landowners on a voluntary

basis and address the significant changes of habitat fragmentation and other impacts across the landscape of the southern High Plains. The land is to protect the beautiful animals like the sandhill crane and pronghorn.

Congress should not be in the business of telling landowners to whom they can sell or donate their land to. If I want to sell my land to an oil company, a developer, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, that is my right to. This bill would unfairly restrict that. The rights of other Americans to exercise the control over their lands, I believe, is a bad policy, and would represent an infringement on my property rights.

The thing that is so critical on this, it is volunteer, and you can do an easement or you can sell it. You don't have to go all in. There are a lot of attributes to this land, and I believe that is that is why I am for it. You can make your own decision. That is what I am all about. Thank you so very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Roley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHN ROLEY

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing today.

My name is John Roley, and I worked in the Littlefield area of Texas for more than 45 years. I had a successful career in the automotive industry and am an active rancher in the Littlefield area.

I own 3,800 acres of land in Hockley, Bailey and Lamb County Texas, and have always been a thoughtful steward of the land. For example, I was recently recognized as a Lone Star Land Steward for the work I have done on my Little Las Vegas Ranch property where I have restored nearly 1,400 acres back to native habitats which have helped local species flourish there, and I've made efforts to make the land accessible for hunting and educational activities.

My 2,200-acre Little Las Vegas Ranch sits on the eastern edge of the Yellowhouse Draw, an area described by Francisco de Coronado in 1542 as the "Casa de Amarillos" due to the low yellow hills. The property is home to numerous quail, Texas horned lizards, mule deer and white-tailed deer. The property is grazed on an as needed basis to manage the periodic regional droughts and is leased for hunting. The first 380 acres acquired were planted back to native grasses and wildflowers with funds intended to help preserve the lesser prairie chicken population in the area.

Since then, additional restoration on old crop fields has resulted in the re-establishment of more than 1,000 acres of native habitat across the landscape. In addition, the restoration of multiple playa wetlands on the property has enhanced its usability for ducks, cranes, geese and other migrating birds. The ranch has undertaken multiple efforts to make the property more suitable for wildlife while also allowing access to 4-H groups, Littlefield Independent School District outdoor education opportunities and an all-women's and new hunter dove hunt. In addition, the ranch allows access for dove trapping and banding conducted by TPWD.

I am also a Republican, a Trump supporter and staunch advocate of private property rights. In my mind, no one, and particularly not the federal government, should have the right to tell a private property owner who they can or cannot sell their land to. It is a fundamental part of our property rights system in America to retain the freedom to do with my land as I see fit. Whether that is to sell it for conservation or development. Landowners should be free to use or develop their property as they see fit and should not be told by any other party who to I may sell or given an interest in my land to, if I so choose. That's an important part of what being an American is about.

And frankly that is why I am here today to oppose the bill HR 839 that would prohibit the implementation of the Land Protection Plan for the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge. After going through a public process and consulting with partners, nearly one year ago the Service released the final Land Protection Plan for the refuge.

The updated plan made a significantly larger acquisition boundary for the Service, aiming to help conserve up to 700,000 acres of land. This broader, landscape

approach enables the Service to work with landowners on a voluntary basis to address the significant challenges of habitat fragmentation and other impacts across the landscape in the Southern High Plains. This plan will also help protect important and beautiful animals like the sandhill crane and pronghorn.

Most important of all, the plan also respects the rights of private property owners within the new acquisition boundary. The Service has been very clear that any acquisitions of private lands for ownership or easement purposes would be on a voluntary basis with willing sellers. As a landowner, I see this as an opportunity, not a threat, to support the maintenance of these lands, places and species that I care so deeply about.

H.R. 839 would restrict my ability to donate, either the fee or an easement interest, my property to the Fish and Wildlife Service. This bill impedes my ability to take action to be a positive part of conservation across the Southern High Plains. And more importantly, this bill infringes on my right as a landowning American to sell or donate my property to whomever I please.

Congress should not be in the business of telling landowners to whom they can or cannot sell or donate their land. If I wanted to donate or sell my land to an oil company, a developer, or to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, that is my right to do so. This bill would unfairly restrict that right, and the rights of other Americans to exercise their own control over their own lands. I believe this bill is bad policy and, if enacted, would represent an infringement on my rights as a property owner.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you for your testimony. I now recognize Mr. Baker for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF BRYAN BAKER, PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR TEXAS PRODUCERS COOPERATIVE, SUDAN, TEXAS

Mr. BAKER. Good morning, Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, distinguished members. I would like to begin by thanking you for allowing me to testify on behalf of H.R. 839, introduced by Representative Arrington, and to share my story with you today.

My name is Bryan Baker. I live in the west Texas panhandle in a small town called Sudan, Texas, and I am a fourth-generation cotton farmer. After graduating from Texas Tech University with a degree in agricultural economics, I moved back home and started farming with my dad and granddad. I farm around 3,500 acres and I still farm some land that my great-granddad broke out of natural grass in the early 1900s. I am very proud to still be able to work that land. I have two step-kids, Libby and Austin, and I am very honored to be part of their lives.

In addition to being a farmer, I also serve on several boards, including the Board of Directors for Texas Producers Cooperative Gin, or TPC, where I have been the Board President since 2016. TPC represents 492 patron farmers, and I am their voice today, as well. TPC consists of two cotton ginning plants, an insurance company with two locations, a fertilizer chemical agronomy division. We have a fully stocked farm supply store, a tire shop, a mechanic's shop, fuel division, and even a barber shop. TPC employs 43 full-time employees, and we add 48 seasonal employees during our cotton harvest time. Many of these seasonal employees are lower-income individuals, and are dependent on this seasonal work, which for several makes up the majority of their annual income.

Texas Producers Co-op, on average, returns \$2 to \$2.5 million to our patrons in the form of a dividend. Most of that profit is coming from local cotton, being gin. Most of these funds, which are

returned to the producers, remain in our local community and are the lifeblood of our area. When farmers thrive, the economy thrives.

The footprint of TPC's patrons extends approximately 60 miles in all directions from Sudan, with a large portion falling into the Biden administration's 30x30 land acquisition plan. As shown in the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge Land Protection Plan, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved a plan that would use taxpayer money to acquire an estimated 700,000 acres of west Texas land.

If some or all of these 700,000 acres are removed from the farming production, an area roughly the size of the State of Rhode Island, it will cause a ripple effect that will be irreversible, as these acres will be permanently removed from production. This ripple effect will not only be devastating to the farmers and employees of Texas Producers Co-op, but also the many local businesses, including banks, grocery stores, and restaurants.

Local schools, the heartbeat of these small towns, will also be impacted. Sudan Independent School District, a national Blue Ribbon school, is one of the schools that falls under this land grab. Sudan ISD has one of the largest school districts in the South Plains, and it covers approximately 583 square miles. There are currently around 450 students, 46 teachers, and 79 total staff employed. According to Scott Harrell, Sudan ISD Superintendent, Sudan ISD has an annual revenue of a little more than \$7,362,000, and spends approximately \$17,000 per student. With 700,000 acres potentially being vacated from private landowners and taxpayers, there will be multiple economic losses, including the reduction in the number of teachers, bus drivers, and staff, as fewer children be enrolled in the local schools. After all, there will be nobody left to live and farm on these lost acres.

My family has called Sudan home for over 100 years, so there is an emotional aspect to this expansion for me. My mother taught fourth grade for 40 years in Sudan. My sister has taught second grade in Sudan for 20 years. I have two nephews, Cal and Nick, who attend Sudan ISD today, and I am fighting for them to always have a place to come home to and be able to call it home.

Congressman Arrington understands the destructive impact this plan will have not only on Sudan and our region, but on Texas and the entire United States. Because if a 700,000-acre land expansion is allowed to happen in Texas, where the entire State is over 95 percent privately owned, it can happen anywhere.

I am very honored to be here today, and this is why I support H.R. 839, to defend the way of life that I and thousands of hard-working west Texans call home. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Baker follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BRYAN BAKER, PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR
TEXAS PRODUCERS COOPERATIVE, SUDAN, TEXAS

Good morning, Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, distinguished members,

I would like to begin by thanking you for allowing me to testify on behalf of H.R. 839, introduced by Representative Arrington, and to share my story here today. My name is Bryan Baker. I live in the West Texas Panhandle in a small town called Sudan, TX, and I am a fourth-generation cotton farmer. I have lived in Sudan my

entire life, except for the few years I spent at Texas Tech University, where I received a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Economics and Applied Sciences. After graduating from Texas Tech, I moved back home and started farming with my dad and granddad. I farm around 3,500 acres and still farm some land that my great granddad broke out of the shortgrass prairie of blue grama and buffalo grass in the early 1900s. I am very proud to be still able to work that land. I have two step kids, Libby and Austin, and I am very proud to be a part of their lives.

In addition to being a farmer, I also serve on several boards, including the board of directors for Texas Producers Cooperative Gin (TPC), where I have been the board president since 2016. TPC represents 492 patron farmers, and I am their voice today as well. TPC has several businesses to serve its farmers, helping them remain competitive in today's challenging economic environment. It consists of two cotton ginning plants—one located in Sudan, TX, and the other in Amherst, TX. TPC owns an insurance company that serves its patrons at two locations. The first in Sudan and the other in Littlefield, TX. TPC has a fertilizer and chemical sales division that is fully staffed with agronomic advisors to provide the latest information on use rates and the efficacy of products on the market. This best-in-class agronomy enables our patrons to make informed decisions for their fields and crops, becoming outstanding stewards of their land. TPC also features a fully stocked farm supply store, a tire repair and sales division, a mechanic shop, a fuel sales division, and even a barber shop.

TPC employs 43 full-time employees, and we add 48 seasonal employees during our cotton harvest time, who provide the labor for the cotton ginning plants. Many of these seasonal employees are lower-income individuals and are dependent on this seasonal work, which for several makes up the majority of their annual income. This seasonal work typically happens between October and late January.

TPC, on average, returns \$2.0-\$2.5 million to our patrons in the form of a dividend, based on the profit of the various businesses. Most of that profit is coming from local cotton ginning plants processing our patrons' cotton. Most of these funds, which are returned to the producers, remain in our local community and are the lifeblood of our area. When farmers thrive, the local economy thrives.

The footprint of the TPC's patrons extends approximately 60 miles in all directions from Sudan, with a large portion falling into the Biden Administration's 30x30 land acquisition plan. As shown in the Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge Land Protection Plan, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved a plan that would use taxpayer money to acquire an estimated 700,000 acres of West Texas land. It is clear how this overreach by the Federal Government and its intended land grab would be detrimental to Texas farmers and ranchers, in addition to our entire local economy.

If some or all these 700,000 acres are removed from farming production, an area roughly the size of the state of Rhode Island, it will cause a ripple effect that will be irreversible, as these acres will be permanently removed from production. This ripple effect will not only be devastating to the farmers and employees of Texas Producers Cooperative, but also to many other local businesses, including banks, grocery stores, and restaurants.

Local schools, the heartbeat of these small towns, will also be impacted. Sudan Independent School District, a National Blue Ribbon School, is one of the schools that fall under this land grab. Sudan ISD has one of the largest school districts in the South Plains and covers approximately 583 square miles. There are currently around 450 students, 46 teachers, and 79 total staff employed. According to Scott Harrell, Sudan ISD Superintendent, Sudan ISD has an annual revenue of \$7,362,385 and spends approximately \$17,000 per student. This school's annual revenue can be broken down by source as follows: 76.3% from local property taxes, 19.9% from state funds, and 3.8% from Federal funds. There are three counties inside the school district: Lamb, Bailey, and Cochran counties.

The total tax base value for all three counties within the school district is \$644,662,980, which serves as the basis for all calculations used by the TEA (Texas Education Agency) to determine the compressed tax rate. Two taxes are assessed: M&O (Maintenance and Operations), which covers the maintenance and daily operations of the school, and I&S (Interests and Sinking), which is used to pay off any bond loans. On the I&S side, this tax is based solely on the taxable value within the school district. If this land is converted into government-owned property and removed from the tax roll, the school has no choice but to raise the I&S tax rate to make the yearly bond payment. This burden then falls on the remaining farms and ranches outside of the targeted area but still within the school district. The Agricultural Property Valuation of the portion of the Sudan School District in each county is broken down as follows:

- Lamb County: \$54.8 million
- Bailey County: \$80.7 million
- Cochran County: \$9.5 million

With 700,000 acres potentially being vacated from private landowners and taxpayers, there will be multiple economic losses, including a reduction in the number of teachers, bus drivers, and staff, as fewer children will be available to be picked up in these acres and fewer children will be enrolled in local schools. After all, there would be nobody left to live and farm on these lost acres.

The Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge, as of today, comprises of 6,440 acres, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The proposed 30x30 plan aims to deliver conservation of up to 700,000 acres, an over 10,000% increase of acreage compared to the current refuge land area. In my opinion, the Muleshoe Wildlife Refuge, as it stands today, is understaffed and undermanaged, and likely will get worse if its size were to increase by 10,000%.

When the Interior Department announced the expansion of this National Wildlife Refuge, it claimed that the plans were developed, informed, and ultimately supported by input from local landowners through a public process. To my knowledge, Sudan ISD, Texas Producers Cooperative, I, nor any of my fellow farmers and ranchers, were ever contacted or asked for input. On the contrary, there have been multiple town hall meetings on this proposal after the plan was finalized and made public, and the overwhelming majority of the people who attended these meetings have been strongly opposed to this expansion.

Since the Muleshoe Wildlife Refuge was established in 1935 by an executive order from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, conservationists and farmers have co-existed through multiple National Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Farmers and ranchers are amazing stewards of the land and many of us, including myself, are avid outdoors men. I have fishing licenses in 4 states and hunting licenses in 3 states, so I appreciate the outdoors, and I do appreciate the work that U.S. Fish and Wildlife does to preserve these resources for generations to come. I am not against conservation programs that make sense, but I am against those like the Muleshoe plan that will cause economic devastation to an entire region and permanently alter the way of life for the hundreds of families that call this place home.

My family has called Sudan home for over 100 years, so there is an emotional aspect to this expansion for me. My mother taught 4th grade for 40 years in Sudan and my sister has taught 2nd grade in Sudan for 20 years. I have two nephews, Cal and Nick, who attend Sudan ISD today and I am fighting for them to always have a place to come back to and be able to call it home. Congressman Arrington is from Plainview, TX, which as the “crow flies”, is only about 45 miles from Sudan. He understands the destructive impact this plan will have not only on Sudan and our region, but on Texas and on the entire United States, because if a 10,000% expansion is allowed to happen in Texas, where the entire state is over 95% privately owned, then it can happen anywhere.

That is why I am here today and why I support H.R. 839, to defend the way of life for the place that I and thousands of hard-working West Texans call home.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Baker. I now recognize Mr. Anderson for 5 minutes of testimony.

STATEMENT OF MIKK ANDERSON, BOARD MEMBER AND COLORADO VOLUNTEER STATE POLICY CHAIR, DUCKS UNLIMITED, AURORA, COLORADO

Mr. ANDERSON. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My name is Mikk Anderson. I am from Aurora, Colorado, which, for those of you who don't know, is about 4 hours south of Madam Chair's and about 3 hours east of Mr. Hurd's. So we are all in the same beautiful Rocky Mountain area.

I am a retired professional water resources engineer, recently retired, still trying to adjust to that; a 30-year volunteer for Ducks Unlimited. I am on the board of directors for that organization, as

well as their conservation program's advisory committee and their public policy committee. Currently, I am the State Public Policy Chair for the State of Colorado.

And I thought, as I was trying to prepare my remarks, I thought, well, if I was sitting in your seats, what would I need to know about this bill, and why would I want to listen to me talk about it? But I think that one of the questions I would ask is, you know, what is really being asked here? What am I being asked to vote for? And as was eloquently described by Mr. Hurd, this is not something new. This is a reauthorization. We know what these funds do. We know how they work. We merely want to reauthorize this to extend it to 2033.

So we are not talking about unintended consequences. We know what is going to happen. We know how it is going to happen. And importantly, we know how we are going to pay for it. In my written remarks I talked about the fact that sportsmen almost 100 years ago advocated for Pittman-Robertson tax. A little strange feeling these days, but we advocated for it so we would have the money to make the kind of improvements that were necessary for our wildlife and for that habitat, and we want to continue doing that. And the interest from this Fund from the sportsmen's organizations and purchases would go to NAWCA.

And why NAWCA? Well, NAWCA is also not new. It is a very effective program at habitat for wetlands. Well, why wetlands? Wetlands are incredibly complex locations of ecology that have a lot of diversity. But obviously, Ducks Unlimited, we are interested in the waterfowl. They have to have wetlands. But wetlands are so much more.

And I would like to just comment just briefly on that, that besides the wildlife, wetlands are huge impacts on water quality. They trap sediment, they trap nutrients, they keep those from going down into our surface waters and aquifer. They delay runoff to reduce flooding effects, and all without having to be managed or operated by someone. It is just the natural process.

The wildlife is more than just waterfowl. Ninety percent of the birds that migrate use wetlands at some point in their life. They may not nest there, they may not winter there, but they use it in migration. If you were in Colorado right now, I could take you out and show you a huge variety of birds that won't be there a week or maybe a month from now. They will be migrated off into somewhere else. But they need those wetlands right now to make their migration successful. That is what NAWCA is doing. It is making wetlands.

The people who are in this panel because of the fisheries issues need to understand that there is a great amount of science coming out right now that coastal wetlands, in particular, are crucial to our fisheries for rearing the small fish and shellfish on the Gulf Coast. Those wetlands there protect against hurricane storm damage, and in the process are just these great nurseries for a wide variety of fish.

Those of the members who are on the West Coast, they are discovering that that is part of the problem with salmon not being produced, is the fact that they haven't had the coastal wetlands to rear in before going out to the ocean. They go out too small, they

are too vulnerable. If they have a wetland, rather than just being flushed out, they are larger and they come back bigger.

And then there is a huge amount of recreation that occurs in wetlands now. That is also an advantage of what is being funded by NAWCA.

I mean, really what we are talking about is funding NAWCA. And NAWCA, as a program, is fantastic in the sense that it is such an efficient and effective program, so if I was in your shoes and deciding whether or not to vote for this, I am not voting just for more waterfowl, I am voting for all those other aspects, as well. And I would encourage you to consider that when you consider your vote.

So Madam Chair, thank you very much for this opportunity. I appreciate that, and I look forward to any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Anderson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MIKK ANDERSON, DUCKS UNLIMITED BOARD MEMBER,
AURORA, COLORADO

Madame Chair, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Members of the Committee—thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Representatives Hurd and Elfreth's Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025, H.R. 2316.

My name is Mikk Anderson, and I hail from Aurora, Colorado. I am a 30-year member, supporter, and board member of Ducks Unlimited, the world leader in waterfowl and wetlands conservation. It is an honor to represent Ducks Unlimited, and our one million supporters across the United States, to talk about the importance of preserving America's wetland habitat through interest investment into the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, referred to as NAWCA.

Ducks Unlimited, Inc.'s (DU) mission is to restore, conserve and protect wetlands to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow and forever. We have been working toward this mission since our founding in 1937 and have conserved more than 18 million acres of habitat across North America. DU boasts 1 million supporters across the country and 850 staff operating in all 50 states. We have sister organizations in Canada and Mexico that provide critical links to a duck's long journey from the frigid breeding grounds of the Boreal Forest to the steamy floodplains of the Sea of Cortez. Ducks cannot distinguish between our borders, so neither does our work.

I have been a DU volunteer since 1994, and a hunter and outdoorsman all my life. Professionally, I am the Executive Vice President at RESIGHT Holdings, LLC, completing real estate transactions and managing environmental projects to create value from environmentally impaired real estate assets. Before that, I spent 20 years with national engineering consulting firms focusing on water and wastewater infrastructure development.

During my time with Ducks Unlimited I have witnessed the transformative work that occurs when hunters and conservation organizations collaborate with federal government and state governments to restore wetlands and other habitat to benefit waterfowl. In my home state of Colorado, and across the United States, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and the Pittman-Robertson Act have achieved tremendous success on the ground for both habitat and game species. These laws are the cornerstone for funding wetland conservation and connecting people with the outdoors and wildlife. These funds have enabled Ducks Unlimited to work hand-in-hand with private landowners, farmers and ranchers, Tribes, conservation partners, and local government agencies to achieve these ends, and this bill, H.R. 2316, is the next step in the long journey we have been on for nearly 100 years.

The Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025, H.R. 2316, reauthorizes the Pittman-Robertson Act's interest allocated to the NAWCA and empowers partner organizations like Ducks Unlimited to multiply those dollars to deliver vital projects that help ensure healthy populations of many animal species, not just waterfowl. This partnership between the users, states, firearms industry, and federal government was established through P-R almost a century ago, recognizing the critical role each play in wildlife restoration. Congress has, and must, continue to recognize the incredibly important force America's hunters and outdoorsmen and women play in protecting wildlife, and waterfowl.

Hunters and anglers have paid for conservation, ensuring that our country was taken from the brink of wildlife decimation in the early 1900's, to a renaissance of wildlife abundance today. In the late 1800's, the country's original conservationists

sounded the alarm on the near extinction of America's iconic species like the buffalo, white-tailed deer and wood duck. By the early 1900's, as a society we began to understand the collective need to act in order to protect the last vestiges of wild America, and the keystone species that rely on this habitat. From the beginning, hunters were the first to raise their hands to fix this problem. In 1937, a Senator from Nevada and a Congressman from Virginia worked with hunters to create a new system to fund wildlife and habitat restoration work, paid for by the hunters themselves. Later that year, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed into law the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, more commonly referred to as the Pittman-Robertson Act, in honor of the two visionary Members of Congress that brought it to the President's desk.

The Pittman-Robertson Act (P-R) collects an 11% excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition (including archery equipment) that is placed in a trust fund. The logic being that the more sporting arms and ammunition bought by hunters as they take to the field, the more money would be raised for the conservation of the very species they were pursuing. The fund then distributes the money each year to each state fish and wildlife agency, ensuring local control of these monies. The states themselves provide a 25% match of funds that they receive from P-R, again ensuring that everyone has skin in the game. The amount each state receives is based on a formula that accounts for how large a state is geographically, and critically, how many hunting licenses are sold. The higher the number, the more money a state receives. Since its inception in 1937, P-R has generated more than \$17 billion for the Wildlife Restoration Trust Fund.¹ The passage of the Pittman-Robertson Act shifted the paradigm of how conservation was conducted, and how hunters led the charge. This created the "user pays-public benefits" model, which has been a key component of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. This model is unique to North America and has been singularly responsible for stopping many iconic species from being relegated to the annals of history at the turn of the last century, to now flourishing in numbers that have not been seen in generations.

Decades later, in an effort to stem the loss of wetlands and waterfowl habitat, hunters who had been funding habitat conservation advocated for a program specific to wetlands and waterfowl restoration. In 1989, then-president George H.W. Bush signed into law the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), which again saw a seismic shift in how conservation is done in America. Leaning on the scientific research from federal and state agencies, and the conservation community, the North American Waterfowl Management plan was born, helping inform the creation of NAWCA. This program focuses funding on the most critical wetland habitats across the country, ensuring that waterfowl populations directly benefit. The vast majority of NAWCA dollars go to hunting lands and supporting public hunting opportunities. NAWCA has a unique model for how grants are adjudicated and awarded. The Migratory Bird Conservation Committee, a committee made up of two Senators and two Representatives, one from each party, and the Secretaries of the Interior, Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency Administrator, reviews all grant applications to ensure only the highest quality projects, those specifically benefiting waterfowl and the hunters that pursue them, will be approved. This system provides a rare level of Congressional and Administrative oversight, inserting a high level of fidelity into the process. Each dollar granted through NAWCA requires at least one dollar of match from grantees. Because of how competitive the program is, match contributions are typically two, three or four times what the federal government provides. This model has made NAWCA one of the most economically efficient conservation programs Congress funds, providing the biggest bang for the buck for the American taxpayer. Since the program's creation in 1989, NAWCA has granted \$2.1 billion, resulting in a further \$4.3 billion in matching partner money, funding 3,300 projects and conserving more than 32 million acres of wetland habitat!²

20 years ago, the Pittman-Robertson Fund began generating record levels of funding. Because the dollar amounts are so large and the time delay for their allocation to the states, P-R allows the Secretary of the Treasury to invest a portion of the fund's revenue that is not needed by the states in any given year in interest-bearing

¹ Campbell, Elena. "Funding Sources." Partner with a Payer, March 25, 2025. <https://partnerwithapayer.org/funding-sources/>.

² "NAWCA—North American Wetlands Conservation Act: Ducks Unlimited." View State Page. Accessed April 2, 2025. <https://www.ducks.org/conservation/public-policy/nawca-north-american-wetlands-conservation-act>.

U.S. treasuries.³ Since 2004, this interest has been allocated to the NAWCA fund because of the continued need of funding for wetlands restoration, and because of its unique governance model. These interest payments have generated an average of at least \$10 million per year for wetlands conservation. This supplemental funding has provided a boon to NAWCA, as project grant applications and demand for funding has skyrocketed. This interest mechanism has a timespan, and it does require reauthorization from time to time. In its current phase, this interest payment expires in 2026. Thanks to Representative Hurd and Representative Elfreh's leadership in identifying this impending issue, H.R. 2316 will ensure P-R interest will continue until 2033.

Sending additional revenue generated by hunter's initial investment from P-R to NAWCA is representative of the legacy of a mutually beneficial relationship between hunters, the state wildlife agencies and the firearm and ammunition manufacturers. For example, to access any of P-R's federal funding, states must guarantee that license fees paid by hunters will be used only to administer state fish and wildlife departments. In addition to directly providing money for critical wildlife conservation and habitat restoration, P-R and its interest to NAWCA ensures that fees paid by hunters are not diverted by states for other uses that do not benefit hunters and the wildlife they pursue.

There is no doubt that state wildlife agencies benefit from reauthorizing P-R interest investment into NAWCA to conserve game and non-game species alike. The ability to leverage P-R dollars with non-federal resources demonstrates the widespread support for these programs amongst the entire outdoor recreation and conservation community. Strengthening NAWCA with P-R interest empowers non-profit organizations like Ducks Unlimited to magnify public-private partnerships for the common good, supporting hunting opportunities across the country and benefiting the very sportsmen and women that pay into these funds.

The year 1937 holds a special place in the heart of duck hunters around the country as the founding year for both Ducks Unlimited and the Pittman-Robertson Act. Both are institutions of American conservation efforts and resulted in a unified call to action from America's sportsmen and women. Since the 1930's, we have continued to lead the way by footing the bill to restore and protect wildlife habitat across the country. NAWCA was a natural progression of both P-R and DU nearly 50 years later.

Since the advent of P-R, other similar funds were created using this model, most notably the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950. Together, Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson have generated a more than \$29 billion to restore, manage and monitor our nation's fish and wildlife resources and improve access for outdoor activities like hunting and fishing. State fish and wildlife agencies have additionally contributed more than \$9 billion in matching investments throughout the program's history, multiplying the benefits to wildlife and outdoorsmen and women alike. These funds have also supported operations and maintenance of more than 800 target ranges and opening of more than 36 million acres of land to hunting and angling.⁴

Everyone with a deep and personal connection to the outdoors owes a debt of gratitude to the hunters and conservation pioneers who laid the groundwork for this harmonious relationship between P-R and NAWCA.

There should be no doubt that outdoor recreation, especially waterfowling, is an essential part of the U.S. economy. In a 2024 report reviewing 2022 economic data, the Sportsmen's Alliance found that recreation hunting and target shooting generated more than \$106.2 billion in combined retail sales and contributed \$133 billion to economic growth.⁵ That data is substantial in the aggregate, but the districts of members of this committee represent some of the strongest in terms of economic contributions of their hunter constituents. In Wyoming, 132,190 hunters

³Irby, Lisa. "Celebrating 80 Years of the Pittman-Robertson Act: Ducks Unlimited." Ducks Unlimited. Accessed April 2, 2025. <https://www.ducks.org/newsroom/celebrating-80-years-of-the-pittman-robertson-act#:~:text=An%20amendment%20to%20the%20Pittman,million%20per%20year%20since%202004.>

⁴McCombie, Brian. "Hunter-Backed Pittman-Robertson Act Provides \$1.3 Billion for 2025 Conservation Funding." NRA Hunters' Leadership Forum. Accessed April 2, 2025. <https://www.nrahlf.org/articles/2025/3/20/hunter-backed-pittman-robertson-act-provides-13-billion-for-2025-conservation-funding/>.

⁵Hunting in America: An Economic Force for Conservation. Produced for Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation by Southwick Associates via Multistate Grant # F23AP00468 awarded by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2024.

spent \$218 million on hunting-related purchases.⁶ Of the statewide totals, Oregon's 4th congressional district represented 63,060 hunters & \$336 Million in spending.⁷ The return on investment from the excise taxes on these transactions can be felt most directly in the wild terraces of the West where I and members of this committee call home.

In Colorado alone, we received \$24.9 million in 2025 from P-R funds.¹ NAWCA in turn has funded 49 projects with \$26.5 in federal monies and \$75.8 million in partner match.⁸

Water 4 Colorado's San Luis Valley I & II is a great example of how much further these projects can go with the compounding power of PR interest and public-private match. Of the over \$8 million total investment in the project, \$5.6 million came from partner contributions. This project will protect, enhance, and restore over 10,000 acres of migratory bird habitat, including over 2,100 acres of wetlands, on both public and private land. Flood-irrigated wetlands, riparian areas, and uplands totaling 1,845 acres on important private farm and ranchlands will be enhanced by modernizing irrigation infrastructure. The San Luis Valley (SLV) is recognized as the most important waterfowl production for the Mallard, Northern Pintail, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, and Greater Sandhill Cranes.⁸

Preserving this incredible model of wildlife conservation funding benefits ALL Americans, not just hunters, and helps ensure sustainable waterfowl habitat and populations for future generations. The nearly 1.5 million waterfowl hunters spend a collective 17 MILLION days in the field and spend more than \$1.3 billion on trip and gear expenses alone. That economy is supported in large part by the investments made by NAWCA to conserve waterfowl habitat in all parts of the country. This nearly century of success has been almost entirely possible due to the delicate structure of that "users pay—public benefits" system. And while those hunters are paying for all that conservation, everyone that enjoys waterfowl, wetlands and the outdoors benefits from their investment.

We need to fortify the common-sense approach to funding in H.R. 2316 and empower partner organizations like Ducks Unlimited that stretch these finite dollars to achieve more with less. Ducks Unlimited's work and that of our partners will continue to focus on educating everyone about the downstream benefits of P-R and NAWCA in our communities and where our passions lay. This is made possible through protecting incredible programs like P-R and NAWCA and your support of them today and in the future. Madame Chair, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, thank you again for the invitation to testify in support of H.R. 2316 and thank you for all you do to protect our wetlands and waterfowl.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Anderson, for your testimony.

I want to thank each of you for being here today and providing us with this valuable information. I will now recognize members for 5 minutes each for questioning, and I am going to begin with myself.

Mr. Baker, some of my colleagues on this Committee seem to believe that the only way to benefit any species or a variety of species is for folks to sell their land to the Federal Government. Do you believe that to be the case?

Mr. BAKER. Thank you for the question.

Personally, no. I fall back that farmers are original stewards. We take care of the land because we have a vested interest in it. We want to leave it better than we found it. So I think that farmers are better with that, as far as taking care of that.

⁶"Hunting in America: An Economic Force for Conservation." Wyoming Economic Contributions—Hunting. Accessed April 2, 2025. https://sportsmensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/2024_SAF_Hunt_Report_Page_090924.pdf.

⁷"Hunting in America: An Economic Force for Conservation." Oregon Economic Contributions—Hunting. Accessed April 2, 2025. https://sportsmensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/2024_SAF_Hunt_Report_Page_090924.pdf.

⁸"NAWCA Colorado State Fact Sheet." Ducks Unlimited, February 20, 2025. <https://duckscdn.blob.core.windows.net/imagescontainer/landing-pages/conservation/nawca/fact-sheets/nawca-national.pdf>.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Why would the Muleshoe expansion plan hurt your community?

Mr. BAKER. For some of the things I mentioned earlier. Number one, our school district falls really large into that expansion area, so there is going to be a reduction in kids there. There is also the tax roll will be affected tremendously if all these acres are taken out of production. So that is going to be a larger impact and a higher tax rate for the farmers that are left outside of this targeted area. They are going to have to pay more. So it is going to cost them more, as far as the tax roll goes, for one example.

The other example is our co-ops and our businesses are all going to hurt from this because there is not going to be anybody left out there to farm those acres.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, and again, being from a State that has such an enormous Federal footprint, I can tell you that those concerns are valid, they are real. It has a huge impact. We often talk about PILT, or Payment in Lieu of Taxes. I refer to that as poverty in lieu of taxes or pennies in lieu of taxes. It just simply does not make up for the economic addition that is associated with private industry, private production, private development.

And as I mentioned in my opening statement, the National Wildlife Refuge System has a \$2.65 billion deferred maintenance backlog. Mr. Baker, as a private citizen living near the existing Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge, do you agree that the Service should focus on addressing this backlog, rather than increasing the amount of land that it manages?

Mr. BAKER. Yes, ma'am. I feel like, if they are going to try to expand this out, it is going to, like I said, not only hurt our tax base, but it is also going to hurt these local schools and those businesses out there.

But I know that there is a thing called a wildlife refuge fund, which is voted on by Congress. And that is when they are allotted so much money to spend on their taxes. And I know last year the Muleshoe Wildlife Refuge only paid \$2,666 to the local tax, while I have a friend that has a neighboring farm right next to the refuge, he paid a little more than that. He paid \$1.65 an acre, whereas the Muleshoe Wildlife Refuge only paid \$0.41 an acre. So I see that only 25 percent of that tax base is going to get paid the way it is if all this goes into a wildlife refuge.

Ms. HAGEMAN. You know, and I am a strong advocate for private property rights. As a private attorney I worked for landowners extensively, probably one of the biggest parts of my practice. And while we have the right to buy and sell land, we don't necessarily have the right for the Federal Government to buy our land. And I think that that is one of the significant issues we are dealing with here today.

Mr. McGlawn, I would like to turn to you now. And Congressman Ezell's legislation would reinstate an aquaculture depredation order that was vacated as a result of litigation and a court order. Part of that litigation centered around concerns that the continued use of depredation orders could have a negative population level effect on the species. Can you explain to the Committee the steps you would have to follow under the depredation order to help ensure that there is not a negative population level effect?

Mr. MCGLAWN. Yes, ma'am, and thank you.

So our first choice is to harass the bird, which would ride around in the truck, try to just keep them out of the water. So if that doesn't work, then we shoot a pyrotechnic, like a flame, in the air. And if that doesn't work, then we have a propane gun cannons that we use that just make a big, loud sound.

So our first line of attack is just harassment, just to try to get the bird off of our farm and back to a roost area, into a lake or a break or anything close by. But, you know, when we get to the last resort, lethal is the only way we can actually get them off the farm at times.

Ms. HAGEMAN. And what are the reporting requirements that you have?

Mr. MCGLAWN. So we apply for the permit, and we make an educated guess on how many birds we think we will take that year. And then we just keep up with every bird we take, and we have to turn it in.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK, I appreciate that. Thank you for your responses and for your engagement.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Huffman for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Roley, I would like to start with you. Welcome. Thanks for traveling to Washington to be part of this hearing and providing your honest opinion of H.R. 839. And I am really impressed with the way you have managed your property and the thoughtfulness and stewardship that has gone into all of that. You noted in your testimony that you have restored a lot of property for conservation, and you have chosen to do that. Why did you choose to prioritize conservation over other things you could have done with your land?

Mr. ROLEY. I don't know. I mean, I grew up in the Midwest, and everything was claimed. There was no wildlife. And I bought my first place that we restored for the prairie chickens. It was amazing to watch those little guys. And we planted the grass that would be suitable for them, and did that, so we could see improvement.

The best thing I did, the mule deer were migrating into our area, and I ran water out, fresh water out every day for the mule deer. And now the herds have gone from 3 to 29, 17, whatever. We hunt with binoculars often, and my wife and I love going out there. So it is nice, I like it. It is a passion.

Mr. HUFFMAN. It sounds beautiful. I imagine that all of that required a significant investment of your time and money, and you decided not to lease the land for oil and gas, which limits the potential income that you might generate from it. Is that all correct?

Mr. ROLEY. We don't have oil and gas on that one. I have got another farm that does have some oil wells.

Mr. HUFFMAN. All right. Can the Muleshoe land protection plan offer additional financial incentives to property owners like you who want to use their land for conservation?

Mr. ROLEY. Well, the deal that I understand is the easements. I have got a friend who is south of the refuge, and he is a cattle farmer, and he is going to put some of his pasture in the easements because he is not going to allow the grass to get too low, because

then you lose everything. And they are good stewards of the land. It is good to have another set of eyes look at your place. And so he is going to put a lot of his property in an easement. He is not selling his land.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Right.

Mr. ROLEY. They are not grabbing it, they are not stealing it. He just wants the easement for the cattle, for doing what he has been doing for years.

Mr. HUFFMAN. So when we hear, as we just did, about 700,000 acres permanently removed from production, nobody would be left to pay any taxes or go to schools or do anything like that, that doesn't necessarily have to be the case at all under this plan, right?

Mr. ROLEY. This easement, he still owns the land, he still pays the property, he still puts the cattle on it.

Mr. HUFFMAN. The kids still go to school?

Mr. ROLEY. Whatever you want to do.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Yes.

Mr. ROLEY. He gets a little help, and he gets a little money up front to help him improve the land. That is it.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Does the conservation of your land have any negative impacts on your neighbor's land?

Mr. ROLEY. Well, my neighbors kind of feel the same way I do. Two of them do. And it has really been helpful. We have got a really nice little area here. My property is 2,200 acres, and my lady rancher next to me has got, I don't know, 450. And between all of us, we have got a good significant place. They need a range. Wildlife move. So they can't just have one little place.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Well, thank you very much. It does seem to me that blocking this plan just because it might align with the Biden administration's biodiversity initiative is shortsighted, and a lot of the rhetoric and other assertions we have heard today really don't bear much of a connection with reality. And your testimony helps highlight the very sensible way in which this plan could move forward in a way that works very well for the community and private landowners. So thank you for that.

Mr. McGlawn, the Fish and Wildlife Service isn't testifying here today, so I guess I have you, and I want to just ask you a couple of yes-or-no questions about the Service's position on H.R. 2293.

Has the Service ever denied one of your depredation permit applications for managing cormorants? And believe me, I understand why you would need to manage the cormorant, given your line of work.

Mr. MCGLAWN. No, they have not ever denied one.

Mr. HUFFMAN. OK, thank you. Have you talked with the Service about your concerns with the current permit process?

Mr. MCGLAWN. We have.

Mr. HUFFMAN. You have?

Mr. MCGLAWN. Yes.

Mr. HUFFMAN. All right. Has the Service expressed recent concerns about their ability to provide depredation permits? In other words, under this administration do you expect that the Service would continue to say yes when you need a depredation permit?

Mr. MCGLAWN. We hope so, but I can't answer for them.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Well, they have so far, right?

Mr. McGLAWN. Yes, they have.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Mr. McGLAWN. Correct.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Yes. If timeliness of permits is the issue, would a fully staffed migratory bird office help to speed up those permit times? In other words, you need someone to answer the phone when you call with a question; you need someone to process your permit application when you submit it; it probably helps to have actual people staffing the office. I am sort of answering my own question, but would you agree with that?

Mr. McGLAWN. I would agree.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Yes, thank you.

Madam Chair, we are happy to try to work across the aisle to figure out this issue, but without Fish and Wildlife Service's testimony and proper oversight by Congress to ensure the Migratory Bird Office is fully staffed, I don't know how we can take this bill seriously. I hope the majority will work with us to get answers to some of the basic questions before moving the bill forward.

And with that I yield.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Mrs. Radewagen for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mrs. RADEWAGEN. Talofa lava. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman and Ranking Member, for holding this important hearing today, and I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. McGlawn, the commercial tuna industry makes up roughly 85 percent of American Samoa's gross domestic product, and serves as a main economic driver for American Samoans. While my family and neighbors do not have to compete with double-crested cormorants, many are familiar with the over-burdensome and challenging regulations that hamper fishermen's ability to do their jobs. When it comes to cormorant management, how would increased flexibility benefit cities and towns like your community in Mississippi?

Mr. McGLAWN. Just being able to manage the population gives us more survivability on our farm with our stocking. Right now we are losing 5 to 10 percent of our crop every year just to bird depredation. So that is less income for us, less income for the community and everyone around.

Mrs. RADEWAGEN. And in part of your testimony you emphasized the importance of competing in a market where costs of production can be high and there is fierce competition from seafood importers. Can you tell us how improved cormorant management would alleviate some of those concerns and strengthen local economies?

Mr. McGLAWN. It would. Like I said, we would have a better survival rate on our farm, and it would increase our yields.

Mrs. RADEWAGEN. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Ms. Hoyle for 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, thank you all for coming here to testify today. It is important that we hear from people who are experts and who have real-life experience.

Mr. Roley, would you like to expand a little bit? Again, like myself, it seems you believe that as a private property owner it should be your choice to whom you sell your property. And you spoke to the values of why you wanted to have your land and conservation. But speak more to the values as a private property owner to make the decision of who you should sell your property to.

Mr. ROLEY. Well, I mean, no one helped me pay for the land. No one helped me pay the taxes. So I am very adamant about I will do what I want. It is my land, and that is what is going to happen.

So, I don't know, we have all got the same feelings in one way, shape, or another. But if someone wants to buy it from me and then put it in conservation, who am I to tell them they can't do that? I can't do that.

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you. Now I would like to ask a question of Mr. Anderson.

I am a big fan of Ducks Unlimited and the work that you have done across this country with wetlands. Specifically, I have seen what has happened in Oregon, and it is really important.

So wetland conservation often gets talked about in terms of environmental impact, but it also has significant economic benefits for local communities. Can you share how wetland conservation boosts local economies?

Mr. ANDERSON. Yes, I would be glad to. There is a lot of recreational activity that occurs around wetlands, and particularly those that are enhanced in a way to increase access like suggested in the title of the act. I am trying to see if I can get access to some of my notes.

[Pause.]

Mr. ANDERSON. With the NAWCA program, it does require a match, a local match, just so during the construction activity associated with the improvements, that alone can bring a significant amount of money, to the State or local location.

I think in Oregon itself, there has been almost \$100 million worth of matching money that has been provided in addition to the grant. Although I am not intimately familiar with Oregon projects, in some of the other locations we often attract much more than just a 50 percent match. I have personally been involved in a program in Colorado that had a match that exceeded 10 times the partner money compared to the Federal money.

So many ways we see the NAWCA money acting like a seed money for that activity. And then, once the project is completed, a lot of times the water resource benefits, the water quantity benefits that I talked about earlier, can yield additional economic advantages, as well. In Colorado, as an example, we use the NAWCA projects to, in essence, put wildlife values on top of water resource projects. And in doing so we have been able to enhance irrigation activity for increased agricultural production in some cases. Also municipal water supplies have benefited from the programs. And in doing so we also, obviously, get the wildlife benefits associated with the water use.

Ms. HOYLE. That is great, thanks. And very briefly, NAWCA funds, which are supported by both Democrats and Republicans, are crucial for supporting conservation efforts. But as we look at

efficiency and transparency, how does Ducks Unlimited, you know, work with the Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure the NAWCA funds go to areas where conservation efforts will make the biggest difference for wildlife, clean water, and communities? Very briefly.

Mr. ANDERSON. Yes. One of the unique aspects of the NAWCA program is the way that it is designed to function in that if some locale wishes for a project, they have to put in a proposal. A lot of times we at Ducks Unlimited create those proposals in conjunction with our partners, and those proposals then are all brought up here to Washington, D.C. for a Committee which has two Representatives from the House, two representatives from the Senate, and Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, and the Administrator of the EPA. So there is a tremendous amount of oversight in the beginning to take a look at the proposals.

They are then ranked. They are ranked according to a scoring technique which is aimed to try to maximize the dollars put to the maximum benefits. And so every funding cycle goes through that ranking process.

Ms. HOYLE. Right.

Mr. ANDERSON. It is a function of a well-known, transparent, supported program.

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you very much, sir.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. And the Chair now recognizes Mr. Ezell for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, we have already vetted this bill from our friends across the aisle, and this bill is bipartisan. I just don't understand why Mr. Huffman refuses to acknowledge bills that are supported by both parties. But with that I will move on.

Mr. McGlawn, in your testimony you touch on the economic burden that the cormorants place on you and your family who help run the farm. How have these cormorants impacted your operations and livelihood over the years?

Mr. MCGLAWN. Thank you. This is my nineteenth crop, so I have been doing this for a good while. So typically, we face 5, 10, sometimes even 15 percent loss to bird depredation. So if you count that over basically 20 years of farming, I have given up hundreds of thousands of dollars of fish that I have purchased, put in the water, fed, kept alive, and had major expenses in that I just do not have to sell at the end of the year. So it is a huge economic loss to us.

Mr. EZELL. You also mentioned that the current system of individual permits is inefficient and fails to provide timely relief for you and other farmers. Can you please expand on the benefits of a national order?

And how will the Cormorant Relief Act of 2025 help fish farmers like yourself and protect your business?

Mr. MCGLAWN. Doing a national order would just simplify and make it a lot more efficient. And just like we said, we have to make an educated guess on how many birds to take that year, and that is just an unknown. We just don't know what the population is going to be in any given year. So like I said, I could have more birds on my permit that I need, and my neighbor could be out, or

vice versa, and under a national order it would just be just a lot better for our industry.

Mr. EZELL. What message would you like to convey to Members of Congress about the urgency of passing this legislation?

And what will the repercussions be if the legislation is not passed?

Mr. MCGLAWN. I think this bill is very important to get passed. You know, even though the individual permits are better than nothing and they seem to work, just because they work doesn't mean they could not be better. And a national depredation order would definitely be better overall for the catfish industry.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you.

And, you know, we need to get this done. This is very important not only to my State, but for the country. And you know, like I say, we have bipartisan support for this, and let's get this thing done.

So thank you for that, Madam Chairman, I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, and I agree with you. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Gray for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. GRAY. Thank you, Chair and Ranking Member, for holding this hearing, and thank you to the witnesses for joining us here today.

As most of you know, adequate water supplies are crucial for wetlands, including both managing current conservation efforts and flooding agricultural lands.

The region that I represent, the San Joaquin Valley, produces over 40 percent of the Nation's fruit and vegetable supply and over 90 percent of global production for a number of crops. In the last half century the focus in our region has largely been on conservation and habitat, and we have done very little to grow our water supply. It is important to conserve wetlands for the preservation of species in the region, while considering the economic impacts such efforts entail. And when I am often asked the three most important issues in my district, the answer is water, water, and water.

You know, sufficient access to water supply has been our biggest challenge for decades. And currently, farmers in my district are losing real access to water that is critical to the survival of the farms and to producing the very food that Americans depend on. The reality is the Central Valley's agriculture economy requires both access to water but also a respect for wildlife. It is not really one or the other, and too often that is a false choice put in front of us in these jobs. I am committed to finding a balance where farmers have the necessary water they need to sustain our thriving agricultural community while both protecting wetlands and wildlife.

My district is home to Grasslands Water District, which delivers water to one of the largest wetlands in the Central Valley. These wetlands are a key habitat for the migration of waterfowl species and vital for their protection. For many years, in collaboration with public and private partners including Ducks Unlimited, the Grasslands Water District has secured grant funding through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act for the conservation of these vital wetlands. However, additional funding is still needed to ensure long-term conservation efforts.

Mr. Anderson, how does funding from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act ensure local partners like the Grasslands Water District can secure necessary funding to support these efforts in the Central Valley?

Mr. ANDERSON. Thank you for the question.

I actually know the grasslands, and that is a beautiful spot, and it is pristine in many ways, one of the few wetlands left in California that is actually pristine.

All the proposals to do some activity in the grasslands or other wetlands in California have to go through the proposal process. They have historically done very well in the proposal process because of the critical nature of those wetlands relative to the wildlife there.

But all of our NAWCA-funded activities are done in close collaboration with other water users in the West because of the nature that you describe of it being a scarce commodity. And it is a collaborative process, not a combative process. And we don't look at it as a win-lose process, but we look at it as a win-win. And I think that the work we have done with NAWCA in Grasslands is very typical and indicative of our approach in that regard, that we see the farmers and ranchers as partners in this process, not as opponents. So the concept is to collaborate.

Mr. GRAY. Thank you. My understanding is that the Trump administration's Federal funding freeze has paused a number of grants allocated through the Conservation Act. Have you heard from organizations about their grant funding being paused?

Mr. ANDERSON. I am not intimately familiar with that, but there have been some issues associated with uncertainty. My apologies. There have been some uncertainties associated with how the grant process is going to move forward, but I don't have anything definitive to add to that right now.

Mr. GRAY. Well, thank you.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support funding avenues for State and Federal conservation efforts, as well as advanced water infrastructure.

And with that, Madam Chair, I yield back my time.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Representative Crank for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. CRANK. Thank you, Madam Chair, I appreciate that.

I am an outdoorsman and sportsman, and spent my life doing that, and I am hoping my wife isn't listening to this, but I have spent an awful lot of money on conservation through my license fees.

[Laughter.]

Mr. CRANK. But I think people don't understand the hunting and recreation community contributes a lot to economic activity at national, State, and local level. But according to a 2022 report by the Sportsmen's Alliance, hunters generated \$45.2 billion in direct revenue, and that is more than the gross domestic product of 121 countries. They also contributed nearly \$38 million per day in State, local, and Federal taxes. And in Colorado alone, 722,370 hunters spent \$1.6 billion on hunting-related purchases, and a portion of that revenue supports wildlife agencies and conservation efforts.

And the hunting industry doesn't just generate economic value, it plays a critical role in conserving habitat and supporting species restoration. Through the Pittman-Robertson Act, hunters and shooters pay an excise tax on guns and ammunition, and this money funds wildlife conservation, hunting and shooting access, habitat restoration, hunter safety and education programs. And recreational shooting accounts for roughly 80 percent of the revenue in the Pittman-Robertson fund.

However, when firearms, ammunition, or archery equipment sales decline, so does funding for conservation. And of course, the same principle applies to oil and gas revenue, where energy production is restricted, funding for education, habitat restoration, and local government also declines. Just a little economic lesson for some. Many people don't realize that sportsmen and women fund up to 80 percent, and in some cases, some States, 100 percent of State fish and wildlife agency budgets.

So there is a lot of lip service about supporting conservation, and I hear it a lot. I get lectured about it a lot. But the funding for conservation comes out of my wallet, as a sportsman, and that is the reality. There is no group that funds it like the hunting and shooting community does because they can't. While other groups shy away from this responsibility, the sporting community embraces it, and we are proud of our role in protecting and managing America's natural resources.

And I recently led a letter with my Republican colleagues in Colorado, including Mr. Hurd, who sits next to me, opposing Senate Bill 3 in Colorado, which threatens the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens. If signed into law, it would have far-reaching impacts on our recreational shooting and hunting communities. And if it is passed it will reduce firearm sales, and that will inevitably lead to less revenue for the Pittman-Robertson Fund, weakening the very conservation efforts that bill sponsors claim to support in Colorado. I will ask Mr. Anderson.

And thank you for joining us, Mr. Anderson, I know you are very familiar with Colorado, and thank you for being here. To see the continued growth in revenue in the Pittman-Robertson account, is it important for the States and Federal Government to implement policies that foster access to hunting, shooting, and the equipment necessary to participate?

Mr. ANDERSON. Well, it is—in Colorado, I think Pittman-Robertson funding itself is I think something like 40 percent of the State budget for the parks and wildlife. It has a huge impact on that. And as maybe you know, maybe you don't know, the way it is distributed among the different States is by the size of the State and by the number of active licenses in that State. So the States that have more hunting licenses get more Pittman-Robertson money.

So not only if you suppress the sales of guns, but if you suppress the access and the ability of people to hunt in there, and so they choose not to get a license, you continue to chip away at your revenue sources from a State standpoint. And there has been some discussion among the sporting community, sportsmen's conservation communities, about how to potentially replace those funds in the event that it happens, as you describe our concern. But there

is not a good, quick answer existing there right now. So as sales go down, it would definitely put pressure.

Mr. CRANK. Thank you.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. And the Chair now recognizes the Chairman of the Natural Resource Committee, Mr. Westerman, for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I can relate to my friend from Colorado and I guess I could kind of rephrase Tug McGraw's famous quote about how he spends his money, but, you know, I spend 90 percent of my money on guns, ammo, and fishing equipment, and the other 10 percent I probably waste. But we all, I think, have a great appreciation for the outdoors.

And I want to thank the other Congressman from Colorado, Mr. Hurd, for his work on the Wetlands Conservation and Improvement Act. We know that NAWCA is an incredibly important program. It is very important to my home State of Arkansas, where 100,000 duck hunters or waterfowl hunters come each year to experience waterfowl hunting in our very pristine wetlands habitat.

Mr. Anderson, I am not going to ask you to compare Colorado and Arkansas duck hunting.

[Laughter.]

Mr. WESTERMAN. But I would ask you to explain how transferring the interest accrued on unobligated Pittman-Robertson funds to NAWCA, how can that foster a cooperative and beneficial relationship between States and the waterfowl conservation community?

Mr. ANDERSON. Well, your Arkansas duck hunters come to our State to hunt elk.

But in terms of NAWCA, to answer your question directly, this bill is to augment the NAWCA funds from the Pittman-Robertson Act trust fund. And every dollar that can go into the NAWCA program is going to be beneficial, at least twice as much because of the match requirements, probably more like three or four times as much. And that enables us to work cooperatively with all the interests, all the sportsmen's interests.

But as I explained, I don't think you were in the room, but I know you know very well that NAWCA program requires a proposal, the proposals are competitive. They are distributed among the States as a function of the ranking system. Your State continues to rank very well because of the nature of your habitat there. But I think that the sportsmen's conservation community is quite satisfied that the proposal process itself does a very good job of distributing, by need, on the funds. And so they put the improvements and investments in the areas where they are going to do the most good for the species.

Mr. WESTERMAN. My colleague, Congressman Ezell from Mississippi, has also done work on a waterfowl issue with H.R. 2293, the Cormorant Relief Act, or also known as water turkeys in Arkansas. I hear from a lot of constituents back home about the destructive impact of the double-crested cormorants and how the current permitting structure is unworkable and ineffective. I have

been up in the Great Lakes area with other Members of Congress, and looked at the issue that cormorants create with smallmouth fry and walleye fry, and it is like they go do damage up there and then they migrate south and really make it hard for our catfish and bait farmers to make a living.

Mr. McGlawn, can you explain to the Committee why the current permitting structure is unworkable?

Mr. MCGLAWN. Thank you, and don't necessarily say that I would say it is unworkable, it is just a little inefficient and we could simplify it and just make it easier.

Where we have issues with it is, like I said, we don't know the population numbers that are going to come down each year. And it is not necessarily just the migratory population. We are starting to get a resident population also. So we have these cormorants, staying year-round on the farm, where typically, 15 years ago, it was from November all the way to May.

But we just need a national, you know, depredation order to be able to take birds when necessary off the farm.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you.

And Mr. Baker, I quickly want to ask you, would you feel pressured to sell your property if your neighbors began to sell their lands to the Federal Government because of the checkerboard effect it would create?

Mr. BAKER. Yes, I could see where some panic selling might take place. Maybe the decrease in the property value because of this expansion of this might cause more tax to be paid for the guys that are outside that circle. So yes, I could see definitely some panic selling taking place out of that.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Madam Chair. I am out of time.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Wonderful. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Webster for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. WEBSTER. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I only have one question that I can think of. This is for Mr. McGlawn.

Aquaculture is important in my State, the State of Florida, and an important industry, and a lot of things happen there about that. And the problem is, as has been already said a couple of times, the Federal intervention, especially with the Endangered Species Act and misapplication of that, and improper use of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, all of that kind of hampers the growth of the industry. And can you tell me how Representative Ezell's bill would streamline the permitting and allow for growth in the industry?

Mr. MCGLAWN. Yes, sir, and thank you.

Basically, Fish and Wildlife Service would approve one permit instead of thousands each year. So it would be time-wise; they would be able to just simplify the process and make it more efficient.

And if the permit is more available to us and easily available to us, we can control the population of birds and, you know, that is just more fish that we have to sell on the farm every year. That is less fish that the birds are eating. So that in turn will help the industry grow.

Mr. WEBSTER. OK. Thank you very much.

Mr. MCGLAWN. Thank you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Would you yield to the Chair the remainder of your time? To me?

Mr. WEBSTER. Yes.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. I just wanted to send a message from Representative Jodey Arrington, and he just wanted to make sure that everyone understood that the critical habitat that he is interested in preserving is the freedom-loving, rural Americans; and the endangered species he is interested in protecting are the farmers and ranchers. So I thought that that was a message well worth providing to everyone here today.

And the Chair now recognizes Mr. Hurd for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. HURD. Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman.

Mr. Anderson, I know you said that you were recently retired, but it looks like you are still hard at work, so thank you for all that you and Ducks Unlimited do for sportsmen and for conservation in our home State of Colorado, but beyond, as well, and across the country. You said something in your testimony I wanted to ask you about very quickly.

You said hunters and anglers have paid for conservation, ensuring that our country was taken from the brink of wildlife decimation in the early 1900s to a renaissance of wildlife abundance today. Can you tell us what would be the impact if Congress fails to reauthorize this authority? What would it mean for wetlands?

Mr. ANDERSON. Thank you for the question.

The reality today is that we are still losing wetlands at a pretty significant pace. A significant part of that is on the Gulf, where we are having a lot of issues with erosion, but also all across the country. Every State is losing wetlands.

The efforts of NAWCA and other programs that Ducks Unlimited participates with, along with the other folks in the conservation community that are interested in wetlands, we are not overcoming that problem. We are just slowing it right now. The less resources we have, the less effort we will be able to expend to stem that tide. And these monies that we are talking about in this bill are important.

Again, as I mentioned earlier, we have the ability in this program to magnify the value of those funds. And in doing so we can have a significant impact, more than just what appears to be the value associated with this particular trust fund interest itself. It gets multiplied. So from that standpoint, it is a very substantial part of the effort that is going to go on across this country towards wetlands. But without it, we are just losing faster.

Mr. HURD. Would it be fair to say that this legislation is critical for wetlands across the country?

Mr. ANDERSON. We certainly feel it is.

Mr. HURD. As you know, the Pittman-Robertson Act is funded by excise taxes on firearms and ammunition. In our home State of Colorado we have seen an increasing number of restrictions on the Second Amendment rights of our citizens, and these policies and laws are making it harder for law-abiding citizens to purchase firearms and ammunition, including hunting gear. Given that this excise tax revenue funds programs like NAWCA, do you believe

Second Amendment restrictions could threaten the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts that rely on this model?

Mr. ANDERSON. I think significant restriction would definitely damage it. Sportsmen and women have been willing funders of conservation for 100 years, and anything that makes those ranks smaller takes away the potential for that funding.

Mr. HURD. Great. Thank you, Mr. Anderson. Thank you to our other witnesses.

Madam Chair, I yield the remainder of my time back to you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Walberg for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. WALBERG. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

As one of the many hunters and anglers on this Committee, I am pleased that we are considering legislation today that would help preserve the wildlife habitat we all enjoy and we are all stewards of.

Having the privilege of representing Michigan's 5th district, which includes both Lake Erie and Lake Michigan as bookends, I know the importance of the Pittman-Robertson funding and the important role NAWCA plays in wildlife habitat restoration, especially in wetlands. Sitting in a duck blind, in fact, one that probably former Chairman and Representative Dingell sat in, with friends and with family, watching the sunrise over Lake Erie, for example, in spite of the presence of cormorants to the extreme, is something that we want to pass along to the generations to come as what we enjoy. In Michigan alone, NAWCA has contributed over \$23 million in funding, matched with nearly \$67 million in partner contributions to conserve over 63,000 acres of habitat.

Mr. Anderson, in your written testimony you outlined the significant impact that both Pittman-Robertson and NAWCA have had on projects in Colorado, and the importance of ensuring these funds are preserved but managed with common-sense approach. Why is it important that we allow the unallocated Pittman-Robertson funds to be used for NAWCA, and what would it mean for hunters like those in my home State of Michigan?

Mr. ANDERSON. Thank you for that question.

Michigan is a very active spot for Ducks Unlimited and NAWCA because of the opportunities that exist there with the Great Lakes being a very critical, important historic migration corridor. That is probably the birds that you have enjoyed in that duck blind.

As I mentioned earlier, that every resource we can get improves our ability to perform the job right now. And with the amount of pressure on the resource for land, other land uses, other water uses, also the pressure that is occurring because of climate variability, it is a critical point right now to have as much funding as is practical and available to try to address those kind of challenges.

But Ducks Unlimited is very active in that Great Lakes area right now, with—Ducks Unlimited is—with a significant amount of NAWCA funding and other resources, as well, trying to answer it on behalf of your constituents.

Mr. WALBERG. Yes, and it is having some significant impact.

Mr. ANDERSON. Absolutely, yes.

Mr. WALBERG. Thank you. I would like to quickly turn to the Great Lakes Fishery Research Reauthorization Act.

This bipartisan legislation would reauthorize the Great Lakes Fishery Research Program within the USGS. The program helps support the important work done by the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission, and provides critical research that helps ensure States can implement sound fisheries management practices. For example, the binational work has helped reduce the destructive sea lamprey population in the Great Lakes.

So I thank the Chair for considering this legislation, and her continued support for the Great Lakes.

I am willing to yield time back to the Chair.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you very much. I want to thank the witnesses for your valuable time and testimony here today, and also for the members for their participation and the questions.

The members of the Committee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we will ask you to respond to those in writing if they are received. Under Committee rule 3, members of the Committee must submit such questions to the Subcommittee clerk by 5 p.m. Eastern on Friday, April 11, and the hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for these responses.

Without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:56 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Hoyle**Opposition to H.R. 839**

April 7, 2025

Hon. Harriet Hageman, Chair
 Hon. Val Hoyle, Ranking Member
 Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
 1324 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle,

On behalf of our 37 organizations and our combined millions of members and supporters, we write to express our strong opposition to H.R. 839, a bill introduced by Rep. Arrington that would prohibit the implementation of the Land Protection Plan for Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge. This damaging bill will be the subject of a House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries hearing on April 8, 2025. We request this letter be included in the hearing record.

The Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge protects important habitats in the Southern High Plains, including grasslands, playa wetlands, and saline lakes. The oldest national wildlife refuge in Texas, Muleshoe was established on October 24, 1935, by Executive Order No. 7214, “for the use . . . as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife . . .” The refuge is home to a population of lesser prairie-chicken listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), as well as sandhill crane, pronghorn, and hundreds of other species. Protecting and expanding Muleshoe is crucial to help combat the growing biodiversity crisis.

The Land Protection Plan targeted by H.R. 839 is a comprehensive document developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to guide the growth of the Refuge within an approved acquisition boundary. It was finalized in April 2024 after 15 years of research, cooperation, and planning. In this document, FWS proposed to establish a voluntary land acquisition program to better protect the vulnerable species of Muleshoe. Up to 700,000 acres of wildlife habitat could be added to the Refuge, although progress toward that total is expected to proceed slowly over many years.

Expansion of Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge is important for the recovery of the lesser prairie-chicken, whose survival depends on protection of its habitat. The species was once common throughout the region. Today, however, 92% of its natural habitat has been lost and its population has declined by 97%. Lesser prairie-chicken require large, unfragmented areas of native grasslands to thrive. Each breeding site, called a lek, encompasses up to 50,000 acres and must be connected to other leks by intact habitat to maintain a healthy population. The species faces extirpation in the region without adequate conservation measures. Preventing further habitat loss and fragmentation is key to eventually removing lesser prairie-chicken from the endangered species list.

Rep. Arrington bases his opposition to the expansion of Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge on concerns that private landowners will be forced to sell their property, face new regulations and that property tax revenue for local communities will be reduced. Exploring these concerns reveals that opposition to the expansion of the Refuge is largely based on misinformation. Under the express terms of the Plan, FWS will “acquir[e] lands only from willing sellers”, so no landowner is ever forced or pressured to sell. In any event, any such force or pressure would be in violation of longstanding FWS land acquisition policy and practice, see 341 FW 1 (Feb. 26, 1996) (“Policy and Responsibilities—Land Acquisition”). Next, being within the acquisition boundary imposes no new regulations on landowners and does not restrict their property rights. Rather, it offers greater flexibility, providing landowners with an opportunity to sell their land at market value and permanently protect it as part of the Refuge System. Finally, while FWS does not pay property taxes on refuge land, lost revenue is offset through payments under the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act and by the boost in local economic activity generated by ecotourism.

If Rep. Arrington’s bill becomes law, it could have long-lasting consequences that undermine science-based management of our public lands, the ability of the Refuge

System to fulfill its statutory mandate for strategic growth, and the recovery of ESA-listed species. For these reasons, our organizations strongly oppose H.R. 839 and urge you to do the same.

Sincerely,

American Bird Conservancy	Large Carnivore Fund
Born Free USA	Los Angeles Audubon Society
Californians for Western Wilderness	National Wildlife Refuge Association
Center for Biological Diversity	New Hampshire Audubon
Christian Council of Delmarva	NY4WHALES
Coast Range Association	Orleans Audubon Society
Creating Common Ground	REI
Defenders of Wildlife	Resource Renewal Institute
Endangered Habitats League	Save the Manatee Club
Endangered Species Coalition	Species Unite
Environment America	The Urban Wildlands Group
Environment Texas	Turtle Island Restoration Network
Environmental Protection Information Center—EPIC	Voice for Animals
Fin and Fur Films	Western Nebraska Resources Council
FOUR PAWS USA	Western Watersheds Project
Friends of the Earth	Wray-Todd Ranch
Friends of the Sonoran Desert	Wyoming Untrapped
Heartwood	Yaak Valley Forest Council
International Crane Foundation	

Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition

April 7, 2025

Hon. Harriet Hageman, Chair
Hon. Val Hoyle, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, I write in support of H.R. 1809, the Great Lakes Fishery Research Reauthorization Act.

The Great Lakes Science Center (GLSC) is the biological research center of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in the Great Lakes region with a mission to advance scientific research and support the restoration, enhancement, management, and protection of Great Lakes fish and wildlife. The GLSC staff responds to the needs of federal agencies, Great Lakes state and local governments, communities, and Tribes. It provides critical biological and ecological data and analysis that decision-makers rely on to protect aquatic resources and communities across the region.

The GLSC fisheries science program is foundational for fishery management decisions on all five Great Lakes. After years of underinvestment, the passage of a dedicated funding source under the Great Lakes Fishery Research Authorization Act, included within the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-94), served as a critical catalyst for science in the region. It allowed the GLSC to execute a comprehensive, multi-lake, freshwater fisheries science program coordinating its work with other governments so that management is cooperative, efficient, and effective.

This legislation will enable the GLSC to continue its work, building upon its ongoing deep-water ecosystem science, shedding light on biological and food web components, helping us better understand fish movement and behavior, conducting fish habitat investigations, and contribute to invasive species knowledge and management. Moreover, the GLFRA will encourage the GLSC to integrate new technologies for fisheries science into the basin's research and management structure. All critical efforts to the long-term protection of the region's \$5.1 billion a year recreational fishing economy.

The Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition supports H.R. 1809 and encourages the subcommittee to move forward to marking up this legislation as soon as practicable.

Please feel free to reach out to our Coalition's Senior Program Manager, Alexis Lopez-Cepero, at alopez-cepero@npca.org with any questions,

Sincerely,

LAURA RUBIN,
Director

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Hurd**Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025**

April 7, 2025

Hon. Harriet Hageman, Chairwoman
 Hon. Val Hoyle, Ranking Member
 House Natural Resources Committee
 1324 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle,

We, the undersigned sportsmen and other conservation organizations representing millions of hunters, anglers, outdoor recreationists, and businesses across the United States, thank you for holding a hearing on H.R. 2316, the Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025. This bipartisan bill will help conserve and protect wetlands across the nation and is strongly supported by the undersigned.

The passage of the Pittman-Robertson Act in 1937 shifted the paradigm of how conservation was approached, with hunters and recreational shooters leading the charge by providing much-needed funding to wildlife and their habitats through the redirection of excise taxes on firearms and ammunition (later amended to include archery equipment). This legacy of collaboration between sportsmen and women, state wildlife agencies, and firearm, ammunition, and archery equipment manufacturers was strengthened with the creation of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) in 1989. Together, these laws serve as critical resources to the foundation supporting our North American Wildlife Conservation Model.

Funds secured through the Pittman-Robertson Act support wildlife restoration, conservation, hunter education, and ultimately, recreational access through efforts led by state game and fish agencies. Because this transfer of funds from the federal government to state agencies does not happen immediately, the Pittman-Robertson Act allows the secretary of the Treasury to invest these funds in interest-bearing U.S. treasuries. Consolidating this interest with NAWCA funds enhances the effectiveness of both programs, which improve water quality and quantity through wetland conservation and ensure robust public access by enhancing our wild places.

H.R. 2316 will continue to allow Pittman-Robertson's interest investment in NAWCA conservation through 2033. Your leadership on this issue will ensure that funds captured through the Pittman-Robertson Act for critical wildlife conservation and habitat restoration are invested efficiently, providing the biggest bang for the buck for the American taxpayer.

We stand ready to work with our industry partners to advance this critical legislation and ensure its successful passage. We look forward to assisting you and your staff with this critical legislation, which will support the continued success of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation for the benefit of future generations.

Sincerely,

Association of Fish & Wildlife
 Agencies

Pheasants Forever

California Waterfowl Association

Quail Forever

Congressional Sportsmen's
 Foundation

Safari Club International

Delta Waterfowl

The Conservation Fund

Ducks Unlimited

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation
 Partnership

National Shooting Sports Foundation

Wildlife Mississippi

National Wild Turkey Federation

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Arrington

Dallas Morning News article, Why I Oppose the Muleshoe Wildlife
Refuge Expansion

NEWS

IN THE NEWS

**Congressman Arrington: Why I oppose the
Muleshoe Wildlife Refuge expansion**

The Biden-Harris 30x30 plan is government
overreach

Washington, September 17, 2024

Tags: [Agriculture](#) , [Energy](#) , [Defending America](#)

The Dallas Morning News

**CONGRESSMAN ARRINGTON: WHY
I OPPOSE THE MULESHOE
WILDLIFE R SUBSCRIBE EXPANSION**

The full document is available for viewing at:

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II13/20250408/118118/HHRG-119-II13-20250408-SD001.pdf>

