

STATEMENT ON H.R. 3906, *Blue Carbon Protection Act*
Rep. Huffman
Natural Resources Committee
Legislative Hearing on “*Ocean-Based Climate Action*”
Tuesday, June 22, 2021

Thank you Chair Grijalva for including my bill, the Blue Carbon Protection Act, in today’s hearing and in your climate legislation. I’d also like to thank you, my colleagues on the Committee, and other Members who have cosponsored the bill.

The concept behind the Blue Carbon Protection Act is simple – it aims to protect and restore blue carbon ecosystems across the country. My bill invests in blue carbon ecosystems so that the carbon sequestration potential of these important areas can be sustained as a key tool in tackling the climate crisis.

Blue carbon is the carbon stored in coastal and marine ecosystems, like mangroves, tidal marshes, and seagrass beds. Coastal and ocean blue carbon ecosystems can naturally capture and store large quantities of carbon, often for hundreds of years, and they are 10 times more effective at sequestering carbon per area than terrestrial forests.

Not only are these ecosystems excellent at storing carbon and helping our climate, they are also some of the most productive ecosystems in the world. They serve as important grounds for feeding, spawning, breeding, and nesting for an incredibly diverse community of animals. These ecosystems are also critical as natural buffers to protect shorelines, coastal communities, and property.

However, these ecosystems are threatened by coastal development, climate change, and pollution. In the last 50 years, up to 50% of some global blue carbon ecosystems have already been converted or degraded. When these ecosystems are destroyed, not only is the carbon that was stored released into the atmosphere, but significant sequestration capacity is also lost. The importance of these ecosystems for carbon sequestration makes their protection and restoration essential for nature-based climate solutions.

My bill directs NOAA to establish a program to research and evaluate blue carbon storage and protect and restore blue carbon ecosystems, including through a new blue carbon grant program.

In addition, it directs NOAA to designate “blue carbon areas of significance.” These areas would be prioritized for protection, and the bill requires consultation and mitigation requirements for proposed agency actions that may cause adverse impacts to these areas of significance.

Lastly, my bill authorizes funding for NOAA, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service, which all have some blue carbon areas under their jurisdiction, to conduct coastal and marine restoration and protection activities to sequester carbon and reduce methane emissions from degraded wetlands.

The Blue Carbon Protection Act would provide NOAA the tools needed to ensure these important ecosystems are part of the fight to tackle the climate crisis.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today. Thank you, and I yield back.