

Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
Legislative Hearing
1324 Longworth House Office Building
January 13, 2026
10:15 AM

- **H.R. 5745 (Rep. Ezell)**, “*Marine Fisheries Habitat Protection Act*”

Questions from Rep. Fulcher for Mr. Chris Horton, Senior Director, Fisheries Policy, Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation

1. Your testimony explained the decades it would take to recover coral populations if rigs were removed. Replacement of rigs is expensive and largely impractical. Even if replacement was pursued, what is the likelihood that the original coral diversity and abundance could be replicated?

You are correct in that it would be impractical to replace the remaining platforms in the Gulf with alternative artificial structures on which corals could similarly colonize. As I noted in my testimony, one state artificial reef program in the Gulf spends around \$500 per cubic meter of habitat volume to construct, haul offshore, and secure artificial reefs made of concrete, which is the most cost-efficient hard substance for creating functional artificial habitats on which organisms like coral can grow. One, four-pile (leg) platform in 130 feet of water, which is a relatively small structure, has around 7,930 cubic meters of habitat. To replace this one structure would cost \$3.97 million. At \$1 million per year for their entire artificial reef program, it would take the state nearly four years to replace one platform, which does not account for the loss of existing habitat. The removal of the remaining structures in the Gulf will create a habitat deficit (relative to today) that we will never begin to approach with the creation of new artificial habitat.

Even if we could replace all the lost habitat, it would take nearly a lifetime to achieve the same level of coral abundance and diversity that we see in the northern Gulf today. The most recent report commissioned by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) relative to corals on oil and gas platforms in the Gulf concluded that, “Oil and gas platforms have facilitated the expansion of coral populations in the GOM. Such platforms have intrinsic environmental value through the presence of coral populations.” They further assess that, “These communities should be considered fragile because of their slow development rate. Mass coral mortality on these platforms would require decades for recovery.”¹

While this study clearly highlighted the significance of oil and gas platforms for benefiting coral populations, many species of which are suffering in other parts of the country and the world, it is

¹ <https://espis.boem.gov/final%20reports/5335.pdf>

perhaps most frustrating that the National Marine Fisheries Service still fails to embrace oil and gas infrastructure, or any artificial habitat for that matter, as significant and important catalysts to healthy coral populations while leading scientists and universities widely acknowledge and affirm that artificial habitat is important to boosting healthy marine ecosystems.