

Chairman Grijalva, thank you for your continued leadership and your dedication to preserving our natural resources. Thank you to the Committee for this hearing on my legislation, H.R.1326, the ACCESS Act. I appreciate the opportunity to tell my colleagues here the important and lasting results of the programs in this legislation.

As former Co-Chair and continuing member of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus, I feel a particular sense of responsibility toward those of us who hunt, fish, and enjoy the outdoors. I am a lifelong hunter and outdoorsman and my name would not be on this bill if it did not promote responsible stewardship. It is a responsibility that we have as Members, to ensure the right of everyone in America to use and enjoy our natural resources, on public lands that belong to each one of us equally.

There is a long, proud tradition of conservation by some of the most committed and responsible natural resource users—the hunters and anglers among us. Today, this bill honors that conservation ethic. For the past 30 years, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act has supported over two thousand projects in this country, carried out by more than three thousand collaborators. The result so far has been 25 million acres of rehabilitated and restored wetlands, which are fundamental to ecological health and species diversity. The ACCESS bill reauthorizes NAWCA to continue this critical work on the nation's wetlands.

H.R.1326 also includes the Resource Protection Act, which allows the US Fish and Wildlife Service to seek compensation when anyone intentionally harms or destroys resources on any of our national wildlife refuges. The Service would then have the money to restore or replace what was damaged. The National Park Service already has this authority—my bill corrects that inconsistency on behalf of Fish and Wildlife Service.

ACCESS includes two Chronic Wasting Disease provisions to address what could be the most serious threat to deer, elk, and moose populations and big-game hunting that we currently face in North America. These CWD bills provide the resources that states and tribes need to manage and research this fatal disease, and directs agencies to work together to find a way to keep CWD from continuing to infect both wild and captive herds.

The provisions in this sportsmen's bill—H.R.1326—are intended to work together to strengthen our ability as a nation to conserve our natural resources. I am so glad that we as a Congress were able to come together in a bipartisan way and pass S.47, the important lands package just signed into law two weeks ago. I'm proud that S.47 includes several of my bills, including Land and Water Conservation Fund permanent reauthorization, and provisions to improve access to federal lands and encourage greater public involvement in wildlife conservation.

The ACCESS bill builds on these and other provisions in S.47 to further provide critical legislation for the benefit of our natural resources.

Again, I thank the Committee for this opportunity to speak and for considering the ACCESS bill.