

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**Chairman Jared Huffman**  
**Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Legislative Hearing on H.R. 2795 and H.R. 3742**

**October 17, 2019**

I want to thank today's bill sponsors, Representatives Dingell, Beyer, and Fortenberry for being here to testify on two monumental pieces of legislation that would create much-needed wildlife corridors and boost funding to recover our nation's wildlife.

In this subcommittee, we've spoken extensively about the insurmountable threats facing many wildlife species, including habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution, and above all, climate change, which are all adding up to drive a sixth mass extinction of life on earth. Top scientists are reporting that one in eight species faces extinction, 29 percent of the birds in North America are gone, and 40 percent of America's freshwater fish are now rare or imperiled. These facts are devastating.

Our constituents care deeply about wildlife, and they are looking to us to fix this. The time to act was yesterday, but it would be wildly irresponsible for us to throw up our hands and give up. We need to take a hard look at what the scientists are telling us and pass legislation that implements innovative solutions. That's why I'm so glad that today we are considering the Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act and the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.

With 122 cosponsors and strong bipartisan support, Representative Dingell's Recovering American's Wildlife Act, or "RAWA," is clearly groundbreaking. There are so many species in need of recovery, but unfortunately, the Endangered Species Act is chronically underfunded. Even so, it has done an excellent job in preventing the extinction of 99 percent of species listed. Other federal funding streams are only directed at certain species, like the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act, which directs funds derived from excise taxes on guns and ammunition towards the conservation of hunting species. RAWA would amend Pittman-Robertson to provide an addition \$1.395 billion per year to assist states, territories, and tribes in their efforts to conserve, restore, and protect wildlife and habitat. This is the kind of investment that is crucially needed right now if we are to make a dent in the extinction crisis. As we move forward with RAWA, I do think we need to seriously

examine the amount of funding set aside for threatened and endangered species recovery. This bill is our best opportunity to both keep new species from being listed under the ESA, and boost endangered species recovery.

The concept of wildlife corridors is something we've only recently begun to understand, and it certainly isn't common knowledge. You see, just like humpback whales migrate from the tropics to the poles each year, many land mammals and birds follow regular migration routes across the continental U.S., which they've been doing for eons. That is, until an interstate highway, or a ranch, or a shopping mall blocked their way. As you can imagine, on roads especially, this creates a hazard both for wildlife and for passengers in cars that may collide with them, which is no small threat when encountering a 1,000 -pound moose. By maintaining natural wildlife corridors or constructing ones that allow wildlife to cross over man-made structures, we can help animals safely migrate and prevent collisions on the road.

A paper published in the journal *Science* in September also showed that increasing habitat connectivity can also boost biodiversity. So, establishing corridors can help us combat the extinction crisis, too. Mr. Beyer's bill would create a National Wildlife Corridors System that would map and preserve wildlife corridors and assist states and tribes in integrating corridors into infrastructure planning.

As we move forward with this kind of groundbreaking, progressive legislation, I must continue to point out that the Trump administration is dismantling our nation's bedrock wildlife protections at every possible turn. Whether it's removing protections for threatened species, shrinking critical habitat to allow oil and gas drilling on public lands, or allowing economic considerations to be part of the listing process under the Endangered Species Act, they seem to never run out of ideas to make things worse. I'm glad we have a witness from the administration with us today to talk about these bills and how we might try to make a positive impact together.

At a time when our nation is so fractured, it's nice to be able to consider wildlife bills with strong bipartisan support. No matter your political affiliation, whether you're a hunter or an angler, a birdwatcher or a hiker, we all want to help imperiled species thrive. If we pass these bills to boost conservation funding and implement the innovative National Wildlife Corridors System, we will have taken two big steps toward that goal.

Thank you all for being here to discuss these bills today, and I'll now turn to the Ranking Member for his remarks.