

Chair Jared Huffman
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Opening Statement
June 25, 2020

Good morning and welcome to our subcommittee's first official legislative hearing since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. During these uncertain times, we have strived to be adaptable and resilient.

Today's hearing format is a new approach for us – we're using a hybrid between an in-person and online hearing to allow for maximum participation at a safe distance. We are committed to the continued development and examination of legislation focused on managing our nation's water supply and protecting our oceans and wildlife. On today's agenda we will focus on six water and wildlife bills, half led by Democratic sponsors and half led by Republican sponsors.

The first of these bills is H.R. 2871, the Aquifer Recharge Flexibility Act, introduced by Representative Fulcher. This bill provides the Bureau of Reclamation and the Bureau of Land Management new authorization to allow the use of federal infrastructure and lands to recharge groundwater aquifers in the western United States.

Many aquifers in the west are currently depleted, and stakeholders are increasingly interested in using surface water supplies to intentionally recharge depleted aquifers underground. While recharging depleted aquifers will be necessary, care will need to be taken to make sure that this new use of surface water for recharge is balanced with other water uses, including existing beneficial uses and environmental water needs such as minimum instream flows for fish and wildlife survival. I look forward to hearing more about this bill today and the challenges and opportunities ahead on the aquifer recharge front.

We'll also hear a bill that addresses a Bureau of Reclamation issue specific to Montana. H.R. 2492, the St. Mary's Reinvestment Act, increases the federal cost share for operations, maintenance, and repair to 75 percent for Reclamation's Milk River Project in north-central Montana, and makes that share non-reimbursable. We've heard about deteriorated conditions at this particular project and the desire for greater federal support for project repairs. I look forward to hearing more about this bill as well.

The last water bill today is H.R. 3937, introduced by Representative Newhouse and cosponsored by the entire Washington state House delegation. This bill renames what is now known as the Third Power Plant at Grand Coulee Dam to the "Nathaniel 'Nat' Washington Power Plant." This designation would honor both Nat Washington Sr. and his son, Nat Washington Jr., who were enthusiastic proponents of hydropower in the Pacific Northwest.

The first of the wildlife-focused bills on today's agenda is H.R. 1776, the Captive Primate Safety Act introduced by Representative Blumenauer. This bill has already passed the House under suspension in a previous Congress. Currently, laws regarding primate pet ownership, including monkeys, chimpanzees, and others, vary by states and cities. While they are charismatic, these animals should not be pets. Primates can carry diseases and can be highly aggressive, adding to

the risks they pose to public safety. Specifically, this bill amends the Lacey Act, one of our oldest and most effective wildlife trade laws on the books, to eliminate the inhumane and dangerous pet primate trade.

The next bill up for consideration is H.R. 2264, the Bear Protection Act, introduced by Representative Ted Lieu. This bill was first introduced in a previous Congress by Senator McConnell and passed the Senate by Unanimous Consent. The Bear Protection Act fights against commercial poaching of bears for their internal organs, or viscera, to protect American bear species. Alarming, China's National Health Commission included bear bile as a recommended treatment for critical and severe conditions of COVID-19 cases, despite recent restrictions on wildlife trade and a lack of robust medical evidence to support its effectiveness in treating COVID-19. Bear poaching is a persistent problem that we must address.

The final bill for consideration today is Chair Grijalva's H.R. 6761, the Murder Hornet Eradication Act. While America has been sheltering in place, the Asian giant hornet was not. This invasive hornet, more commonly referred to as the "murder hornet", is the world's largest wasp and can grow up to two inches in length. It is notorious for destroying beehives and overtaking honeybee colonies within 90 minutes. These hornets were first sighted near the Canada and Washington State border in December 2019 and a second population was observed in Blaine, Washington in April 2020. We must protect our country's bee populations before these hornets spread further. This bill authorizes financial assistance to States in need of detecting and eradicating Asian giant hornets.

Thank you all for being here to discuss the legislation before us today.