

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

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**TESTIMONY OF HON. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY**

**JULY 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, and Members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here today to express my strong support for my bill H.R. 2793, the Highlands Conservation Reauthorization Act. This critical bill would renew a hugely popular program that has been used to protect open spaces, drinking water supplies, and recreational opportunities throughout the Highlands Region of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut. The areas protected under this program support the local economies of these largely suburban and rural communities by promoting conservation-based tourism. This bipartisan bill has already gained 22 co-sponsors across every Highland state.

**THE HIGHLANDS CONSERVATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT**

The Highlands Conservation Act represents a unique public-private partnership model, which has been used to conserve more than 11,000 acres since its initial enactment in 2004 and leverages Congress' investment more than 2 to 1 in matching state, municipal and private contributions. My bill, the Highlands Conservation Reauthorization Act, expands upon the original law by increasing the authorized amount of funding to reflect the demand for the program. This bill includes a petition process whereby states can request additional municipalities be included, resulting in an expansion of eligibility for funding. This will increase

local engagement and promote community-based conservation. The bill also provides the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) with modernized tools and science, and additional funding to carry out this effort more efficiently with its partners.

At a time when our tourism economy is struggling to recover from COVID-19, this reauthorization cannot happen soon enough. Through a state and locally driven process, this bill will advance conservation, tourism, wildlife protections, and recreation in the Highlands region. It also aligns with President Biden's America the Beautiful Initiative and goal to conserve 30 percent of U.S. land and waters by 2030.

On Wednesday, June 23rd, 2021, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing on the Senate companion bill, S.753. The Department of Interior (DOI) submitted a letter of support for the bill emphasizing how critical its passage will be for the continued success of the Highlands Conservation program. I am grateful for the House Committee on Natural Resources' efforts in promoting and advancing conservation and appreciate my bill's inclusion in this hearing.

### CONCLUSION

To close, I again want to express my thanks for the Committee's time and attention to this and other bills crucial to preserving our environment. We are stewards of this planet, and it's our job to preserve our great outdoors for our kids and grandkids to enjoy for generations to come. I am proud to be leading this fight in Congress, and I look forward to getting this bill on the House floor for a vote.