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**Before the Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Water,
Oceans and Wildlife**

**H.R. 6949, the “Delaware River Basin Conservation Reauthorization
Act of 2022”**

Thursday, June 16, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. via WebEx

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife for holding this hearing on important legislative efforts to conserve our natural resources, wetlands, and water systems.

I am proud today to discuss my bill, H.R. 6949, the Delaware River Basin Conservation Reauthorization Act, which will reaffirm Congress’s commitment to protecting the Delaware River Watershed by reauthorizing the original Act passed in 2016.

This bipartisan bill was drafted with the support of my good friends, Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, Representative Lisa Blunt Rochester, and former Representative Antonio Delgado.

The Delaware River Watershed is the economic and environmental heart of the mid-Atlantic. The Watershed creates thousands of jobs and provides water to millions of Americans.

Protecting the river and its surrounding environments is of the utmost importance to the residents of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Delaware.

We must not only protect this key environmental region, but we must also work to increase economic opportunity and environmental justice for the over eight million Americans who live in its basin.

Overseen by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Program works to conserve and restore wildlife habitats, improve flood mitigation, increase access to recreational opportunities in the basin, and more. It is a vital federal source of technical and grant assistance to entities in its jurisdiction.

Through its Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund, the Program has funded 123 projects in the Delaware River Basin since 2016, with a total conservation impact of over 72 million dollars.

In Philadelphia, the Program has supported numerous efforts towards conservation and environmental education, including funding for the Schuylkill River Development Corporation to rehabilitate a pier in disrepair and improve shoreline conditions on the Schuylkill river.

Additionally, the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary in Pennsylvania has received grant funding to improve water quality and erosion control along the urban shoreline of the Delaware River, improving the long-term health of both the river and the residents who live along its shore in Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey.

Funding has also been utilized by the Delaware River Basin Commission, which oversees interstate river and water resources in the region, to research the impacts of PFAS, also known as forever chemicals, in water supplies ranging from New York to New Jersey. This funding is crucial to future decontamination efforts and ensuring clean drinking water for millions of residents.

Projects in Cumberland County, New Jersey have received grants from the Program to utilize green infrastructure to install stormwater management systems along the Maurice River, while promoting water filtration efforts and habitat restoration.

And in New York, the Friends of the Upper Delaware River, are using funds to improve trout habitats and create new public access points and recreational opportunities for residents across the upper edge of the basin, growing the region's economy and improving the wellbeing and health of its residents.

Passing the Delaware River Basin Conservation Reauthorization Act will ensure that programs like these and others will continue to see federal support through 2030.

Through this legislation, we are also improving the Program by increasing assistance to small, rural, and disadvantaged communities.

Under this legislation, the federal cost share of projects in these communities will be raised to ninety percent, and the Secretary of the Interior will be able to waive this cost entirely for communities experiencing financial hardship. These changes are in line with the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that Congress passed last year.

Making these adjustments is necessary to reduce disparities for communities which would benefit from investment, but which until now have not been able to meet the high costs associated with their needed conservation projects.

Chairman Carper of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works has introduced a companion bill to this legislation, ensuring that there is both bipartisan and bicameral support for reauthorizing this important Program.

Currently, the Program is set to sunset in 2023 -- however, to ensure that Americans have full faith in the important conservation efforts in the Delaware River Watershed, we must pass this reauthorization bill to prevent a lapse in funding and prevent unnecessary slowdowns to planned and ongoing projects in the region.

I appreciate the leadership of Subcommittee Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member Bentz, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass this important, necessary, and bipartisan legislation for the American people, and help the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program continue its important work.

I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a letter of support from the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed.

Thank you, and I yield back.