



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

SEP 25 2023

The Honorable Cliff Bentz
Chairman
Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water,
Oceans, and Wildlife
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bentz:

Enclosed are responses prepared by the Department of the Interior to the questions for the record submitted following the May 10, 2023, legislative hearing on *H.R. 524, To amend the Coastal Barrier Resources Act to create an exemption for certain shoreline borrow sites*, *H.R. 615, Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act of 2023*, *H.R. 2689, Trust in Government Act of 2023*, and *H.R. 2872, To amend the Permanent Electronic Duck Stamp Act of 2013 to allow States to issue electronic stamps under such Act*.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to you on this matter, and we apologize for the delay in our response.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Salotti
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member

Questions for the Record
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
House Natural Resources Committee
Legislative Hearing
May 10, 2023

Questions from Chairman Bentz

Question 1: In 2020, the Service launched phase one of a new electronic permitting system that enables applicants to apply for their permits online. According to the Service, they anticipate completing the full buildout of the ePermits system by FY2028. How much did it cost the Service to launch phase one of the ePermits system?

Response: In FY 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) released ePermits, a modern, secure, customer-facing online permit system with a \$3.4 million investment. Since FY 2020, the FWS has invested \$20.3 million to improve and expand ePermits to achieve technical milestones such as integrating with Pay.gov and Login.gov, building a library of 85 PDF customer-facing application forms, migrating 71,000 records from the legacy system, launching a technical support feature to help customers using the system, standardizing common application fields, and upgrading the platform. In August 2023, the Service conducted a public satisfaction survey of ePermits users and found that 69% were satisfied with the electronic process, a number the Service aims to increase with continued improvements.

Question 2: The Services' FY24 budget request for ePermits is \$13.5 million, almost double the 2023 enacted levels. Does the Service have an estimate of the total cost of building out the ePermits system?

Response: The FWS requires \$13.5 million in FY 2024 to support build out and required maintenance for the base system of over 80 permit application types, as well as enhancements to include Migratory Birds Program regulatory changes, certain National Wildlife Refuge System Special Use Permits in ePermits, and to transition U.S. permitting under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) from security paper-dependent to fully electronic permits. The FWS will continue to work with the President and Congress to evaluate future needs for successful expansion of ePermits.

Question 3: The Services' ePermits system currently has 50,000 user accounts for 85 available permits, that's just one agency. Does the Department have a sense as to how many permits would need to be made available online to comply with H.R. 2689?

Response: The Department of the Interior does not have an estimate as to the number of permits that would be impacted by H.R. 2689.

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Question 4: Does the Department have an estimated as to how much it would cost to implement the provisions of HR 2689?

Response: The Department of the Interior does not have an estimate as to how much it would cost to implement the provisions of H.R. 2689. We would anticipate that a new system would require significant funding and substantial agency staffing.

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Question from Rep. Carl

Question 1: Why is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pursuing a ban of lead fishing tackle and ammunition provisions under the guise of human health impacts, when a Center for Disease Control (CDC) study released by the North Dakota Department of Health show none of those tested had unsafe blood lead levels?

- a. https://www.nps.gov/pinn/learn/nature/upload/Iqbal_2008_Assessment%20of%20human%20health%20risk%20from%20consumption%20of%20wild%20game%20meat%20with%20possible%20lead.pdf

Response: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is not pursuing a ban of lead fishing tackle and ammunition. The FWS mission, which is grounded in the laws that mandate our work, is to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Consistent with our mission, the FWS' primary basis for any decisions regarding lead ammunition and tackle is the negative impact of lead ammunition and tackle on fish and wildlife health, based on the best available, peer-reviewed science. At the handful of specific stations where the FWS has decided to require the use of non-lead ammunition and tackle, we have made those decisions to reduce a known threat to wildlife species while still providing access to hunters and anglers.

Although it is not the primary basis for FWS decision-making related to lead ammunition and tackle use on specific national wildlife refuges, we note that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) study cited in the question does not support an assertion that lead ammunition and tackle are without harm to human health. On the contrary, the study, together with others, provides clear evidence that there are human health impacts from bioaccumulated lead, and thus reason to be cautious about the use of lead ammunition from that perspective.