

House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries  
July 27, 2023, 10:15am  
Congressman Paul D. Tonko

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**WITNESSES:**

**Panel I: Members**

**Panel II:**

- Dr. Kelly Kryc, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Mr. Stephen Guertin, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**Panel III:**

- Mr. William Gibbons-Fly, Executive Director, American Tunaboat Association
- Mr. Jack Graham, Captain, Afishianado Charters
- Ms. Jessica McCawley, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Mr. Gene Shawcroft, Central Utah Water Conservancy District
- Mr. Steve Wolff, Southwestern Water Conservation District
- Mr. Charlie Beshler, National Cattlemen's Beef Association
- Ms. Genevieve Genest, Galveston Bay Foundation
- Mr. Seth Atkinson, Quillback Consulting [minority witness]

**TESTIMONY:**

Thank you, Chairman Bentz and Ranking Member Huffman, for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee and for including my bill, H.R. 2982, the New York-New Jersey Watershed Protection Act, in today's hearing.

I am proud to represent New York's Capital Region, a community and economy that is inextricably linked to the historic Hudson and Mohawk Rivers that flow nearby. These waters, along with the Raritan River and their tributaries, make up the nation's most populous watershed. Our water resources serve as sources of drinking water for millions of people, provide habitats for more than 200 fish species, and support critical outdoor recreation and tourism industries.

Like water resources all across the country, our waterways have, for decades, faced severe challenges that threaten public health and safety. The Hudson River is the nation's largest Superfund site. Hazardous waste and legacy chemicals remain unacceptably high, threatening the health and safety of ecosystems, wildlife, and human health throughout the entire Watershed. The metropolitan area includes more than 500 miles of coastline, yet only a scant few of those miles are available for outdoor recreation, and even fewer in communities experiencing environmental injustice.

Record rainfall over this past month has caused catastrophic flooding across New York, endangering families and communities and causing significant infrastructure damage, closed

roadways, and delayed travel. Extreme weather events and the impacts of sea-level rise like increasing storm surges and flood risks are only being exacerbated by the climate crisis.

We must take pause and re-evaluate our connection and responsibility to the waters of our region.

Local watershed stewardship – by coordinated groups of community leaders, scientists, outdoor recreationists, and others – is so important to restoring the health and resilience of our water resources, and the communities and economies that rely on them. Across the nation, there is a network of effective regional watershed programs – for example, in Delaware, the Great Lakes, and the Chesapeake Bay – that create a targeted role for the federal government in coordinating and boosting local conservation efforts.

The New York-New Jersey Watershed Protection Act would fill a gap in our nation’s regional watershed programs by extending this existing model to the Hudson, Mohawk, and Raritan Rivers and their tributaries.

I am proud to have reintroduced this legislation in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress with 20 bipartisan cosponsors and more than 50 local and national stakeholder groups. The bill would establish the New York-New Jersey Watershed Restoration Program and Grant Program to coordinate restoration efforts across the region, build local capacity, and implement local restoration plans that communities have already found consensus on. The program would ensure that restoration efforts utilize science-based principles to protect fish and wildlife habitats, improve water quality, increase public access, mitigate flood risks.

I greatly appreciated the engagement from my colleagues across the aisle in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress that resulted in new additions and changes to the bill before it advanced out of Committee and was passed by the House, and I am prepared and eager to work with you to continue that process in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The New York-New Jersey Watershed is an economic engine not just for our local communities, but for the nation, and federal investment is long overdue to ensure that these water resources can continue to boost economic opportunity, tourism, and outdoor recreation, while protecting public health and access to clean water.