

1. Mr. Knutson, one of the themes our Committee has talked about repeatedly in recent months is the multiple uses of our natural resources for sectors of our economy and for recreational activity.

Can you share your perspective on how the Delaware River Basin serves these multiple uses?

The Delaware River Basin and its many natural resources support the economy and recreation in many different and valuable ways. The Delaware River Basin Restoration Program is an essential program that ensures the continued conservation of the basin and its many resources for the benefit of the local, regional and national economy, endless recreational opportunities throughout the basin, and the continued supply of clean drinking water for millions of people.

A 2016 study by the University of Delaware's Water Resources Center which is one of the most comprehensive studies of the basin to date, calculated that the Delaware River basin contributes over \$21 billion in annual economic activity from fish and wildlife (\$1.5 billion, which includes commercial and recreational fishing and hunting), public parks (\$1.8 billion), water quality (\$2.5 billion), navigation (\$2.6 billion), agriculture (\$3.4 billion), water supply (\$3.8 billion), and forest benefits (\$5.1 billion, which includes environmental and health benefits). The Delaware basin supports 600,000 direct/indirect jobs with \$10 billion in wages in the coastal, farm, ecotourism, water/wastewater, ports (Ports of Philadelphia, Wilmington, Camden, and Salem), and recreation industries. In addition, as I noted in my testimony, the Delaware River watershed serves as the source of clean drinking water for over 14 million Americans – roughly 5% of the U.S. population. The Delaware River Basin Conservation Act, which was enacted by Congress in 2016, has only helped bolster the contributions the broader Delaware River watershed contributes to the economy and residents as more recreational opportunities have been made available, improved water quality and more jobs as a growing number of people access the natural treasures throughout the watershed.

In addition, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been engaging with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to further support conservation practices that align well with the habitat needs of fish and wildlife. By working with agricultural producers and forestland owners, NRCS and FWS are enhancing working lands, which is key to this watershed that is 21% in agricultural lands. Benefits are numerous: increased habitat for pollinators, improved water quality for economically and culturally important fish species, and enhanced forest management for forest a variety of forest bird species.

2. Mr. Knutson, in your testimony you noted that since 2018 the Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund-a core part of the Delaware River Watershed's conservation programs-has awarded \$55.1 million with a generated match of \$79.2 million. Can you talk about how these programs have helped to leverage taxpayer dollars in a way that effectively gets resources to the places they're needed most?

The Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund (DWCF) has and continues to select high quality projects in areas of the greatest need, but that also leverage much more funding than the non-Federal match required by the enacting legislation. In fact, the Program's funding strategy prioritizes projects that have the potential to generate significant matching funds from other sources, and encourages collaboration among various stakeholders. Additionally, the Program emphasizes projects that provide multiple benefits, such as improving water quality, enhancing wildlife habitat, and supporting recreational activities. In the first six years of funding, funded projects have provided an additional \$24.1 million over and above what was required – that provides an additional 44% of on-the-ground project work that would not have been done if only the minimum “one for one” dollar match was provided. The Fish and Wildlife Service's partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) as the implementing partner for the DWCF is critical to bringing non-federal match to the table since one of NFWF's primary purposes, to raise private funds to match with federal funds, was one of Congress's reason for creating the Foundation forty years ago.

Over the first six rounds of grants, the implementing partners have developed and funded a diversity of projects both geographically, and by type. Concern continues to grow among underserved and rural communities that the current matching fund requirements of the Program will hinder or even fully prevent these communities from qualifying – even in cases where these communities have developed expertise to implement the projects effectively. Concern is also growing that as the needs of the Delaware River Basin grow, there will not be enough implementation partners able to manage quality projects due to the current match requirements that limit the number of organizations and communities that can qualify for the funding.

3. One of the changes that the Delaware River Basin Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2023 makes to the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program is adding the state of Maryland.

a. Can you talk about how adding Maryland to this program will expand and improve restoration efforts across the Delaware River Basin?

b. As knowledge of the reach of the Delaware River has increased, how important is it to ensure that Maryland is involved seeking solutions to challenges to restoration and conservation efforts?

The addition of Maryland to the DRBCA is simply a technical correction to the existing law. The second Finding under the original law states: “The Basin contains over 12,500 square miles of land in the States of Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, including nearly 800 square miles of bay and more than 2,000 tributary rivers and streams;” This geographic description of the “basin” or watershed, is technically incorrect because a small portion of Maryland includes part of the watershed and therefore Maryland should be included in the authorizing statute.

The Christina River originates in southeast Pennsylvania and flows 35 miles through the northeast corner of Maryland into Delaware and then joins the mainstem of the Delaware River in Wilmington, DE. Although “Maryland” was not mentioned in the original Act, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service would consider any proposed project in the Maryland portion of the basin to be eligible for consideration of funding, although no such proposals have been submitted to date. The inclusion of Maryland in the bill simply fixes a geographic omission. It does not negatively impact the Program in any way and but should expand cross-jurisdictional conservation practices to address the needs of the watershed more comprehensively.

The large majority of the Christina River watershed is upstream from Maryland in Pennsylvania (71% of the watershed), and 28% is downstream in Delaware. With only 1% of the Christina River watershed in Maryland there is little that can be done in the Maryland portion of the watershed to have significant impacts on the rest of the river system, but every restoration action can still have a positive impact.