



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

DEC 31 2024

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

Dear Chairman Bentz:

Enclosed are responses to questions for the record submitted to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Martha Williams following her appearance before your Subcommittee at the May 16, 2024, oversight hearing on the Fiscal Year 2025 budget request. These responses were prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to you on this matter.

Sincerely,

Pamela L. Barkin
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member

Questions for the Record
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
Oversight Hearing *"Examining the President's Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Proposal for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service."*
May 16, 2024

Questions from Chairman Cliff Bentz

Question 1: In September of 2023 the White House published the *Memorandum on Restoring Healthy and Abundant Salmon, Steelhead, and Other Native Fish Populations in the Columbia River Basin*. Among other things, the memo directed "all agencies with applicable authorities and responsibilities" to provide the Office of Management and Budget an assessment of the agency's programs that can advance the policy established in section 1 of this memorandum."

What authorities or programs did the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provide to the Office of Management and Budget to carry out the policy established in this memorandum?

Response: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) mission and authorizing legislation provide broad authorities for the restoration of species consistent with the intent of President Biden's *Memorandum on Restoring Healthy and Abundant Salmon, Steelhead, and Other Native Fish Populations in the Columbia River Basin*, including riparian and aquatic habitat restoration, recovery projects for bull trout, and operation and maintenance of national fish hatcheries. As a result, the Service identified several authorities and programs that could aid in restoration of native aquatic species in the Columbia Basin. These authorities included: Endangered Species Act, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the Federal Power Act. As with any large-scale watershed conservation effort, a number of programs across the Service are engaged in response to the Presidential Memorandum, including the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, National Fish Passage Program, National Wildlife Refuge System, National Fish Hatcheries, Office of Conservation Investment, Ecological Services, and the Branch of Aquatic Invasive Species. In addition, the Service's responsibilities under the Pacific Salmon Treaty are relevant to carry out the established policy.

Question 2: With regard to the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, in March 2021, a one-hour conference call was conducted in which affected members of the fishing industry were given less than five minutes each to explain their reasons for opposing a reimposition of the commercial fishing ban to DOI staff. One of the more severely affected groups, the swordfish and tuna harvesters, reached out to DOI repeatedly via phone, letters and email, requesting a meeting so that members of the swordfish and tuna longline industry could explain why analyses funded by environmental interests claiming that the commercial fishing ban had no negative effect on their fisheries were inaccurate.

Their correspondence was acknowledged upon receipt by Shantha Ready Alonso, Director of the Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs (OIEA), but despite numerous follow-up calls and emails, they received no response to their request. In December 2021, they received a form letter from Martha Williams of the U.S. Fish and

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Wildlife Service stating that two months earlier, President Biden signed Presidential Proclamation 10287 "Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument" reimposing the prohibition on commercial fishing.

Did you or your staff meet with any fishing interests affected by the commercial fishing prohibition in the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument before President Biden signed Presidential Proclamation 10287?

- 1. If so, with whom did you meet?**
- 2. If so, were any of the groups with whom you or your staff met organizations that accept support, financial or otherwise, from environmental or conservation organizations or their funding sources?**

Response: The Service did not meet with fishing interests before President Biden signed Presidential Proclamation 10287 on October 8, 2021. The Service defers to the White House and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for information about any meetings that they may have had with fishing interests prior to the proclamation being signed.

Question 3: The U.S. Department of the Interior press release on several monuments issued on October 7, 2021, referenced "rare and endangered marine life," specifically mentioning deep-sea corals. Deep-sea corals in the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument were already protected through previous actions taken by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils and approved by National Marine Fisheries Service, which protected those important species without hindering the ability of fisheries operating in the region from operating sustainably under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

What additional protection is afforded by prohibiting commercial fishing activity in the water column above the bottom habitat of those species?

Response: NOAA has jurisdiction over marine fisheries. The Service defers to NOAA on questions regarding commercial fishing.