

**H.R. 1885, H.R. 2294, H.R. 2860,
AND H.R. 3179**

LEGISLATIVE HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, WILDLIFE AND
FISHERIES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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CONTENTS

	Page
Hearing Memo	v
Hearing held on May 20, 2025	1
Statement of Members:	
Hageman, Hon. Harriet, a Representative in Congress from the State of Wyoming	2
Elfreth, Hon. Sarah, a Representative in Congress from the State of Maryland	2
Huffman, Hon. Jared, a Representative in Congress from the State of California	8
Gray, Hon. Adam, a Representative in Congress from the State of California, prepared statement for the record	52
Panel I:	
Ezell, Hon. Mike, a Representative in Congress from the State of Mississippi, prepared statement for the record	46
Murphy, Hon. Gregory F., a Representative in Congress from the State of North Carolina	4
Larsen, Hon. Rick, a Representative in Congress from the State of Washington	5
Babin, Hon. Brian, a Representative in Congress from the State of Texas	7
Statement of Witnesses:	
Panel II:	
Miko, David, Acting Deputy Director of Operations, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior Washington, D.C.	9
Prepared statement of	11
Questions submitted for the record	13
Panel III:	
Nungaray, Alexis, Mother of Jocelyn Nungaray, Houston, Texas	26
Prepared statement of	27
Howden, Stephan, Professor, University of Southern Mississippi, Stennis Space Center, Mississippi	28
Prepared statement of	29
Young, Robert, Professor, Department of Geosciences and Natural Resources, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina	30
Prepared statement of	32
Leonard, Tom, Alderman, Town of North Topsail Beach, North Topsail Beach, North Carolina	33
Prepared statement of	35
Additional Materials Submitted for the Record:	
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, Statement	45
Submissions for the Record by Representative Ezell	
FY26 Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS), Appropriations Letter	42
Woods Hole Group, Support Letter	47
Tampa Bay Pilots Association, Support Letter	48
The U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS): A Prototype User Valuation	49
BAMA Sea Products, Support Letter	50
Sofar Ocean Technologies, Support Letter	51



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries staff: Annick Miller, (annick.miller@mail.house.gov), Doug Levine (doug.levine@mail.house.gov), Kirby Struhar (kirby.struhar@mail.house.gov), and Thomas Shipman (thomas.shipman@mail.house.gov) x58331
Date: Monday, May 19, 2025
Subject: Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1885, H.R. 2294, H.R. 2860, and H.R. 3179

The Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will hold a legislative hearing on H.R. 1885 (Rep. Murphy), *“Town of North Topsail Beach Coastal Barrier Resources System Map Amendment Act of 2025”*; H.R. 2294 (Rep. Ezell), To reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of 2009; H.R. 2860 (Rep. Larsen) *“Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2025”*; and H.R. 3179 (Rep. Babin), To rename the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge located in the State of Texas as the “Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge” on **Tuesday, May 20, 2025, at 10:30 a.m. (EDT) in 1334 Longworth House Office Building.**

Member offices are requested to notify Jackson Renfro (jackson.renfro@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, May 19, 2025, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- House Republicans are holding a hearing on three bills that promote local control of land use decisions, science-based decision making, and codify an Executive Order signed by President Trump honoring a victim of senseless violence.
- H.R. 1885 promotes responsible development of coastal communities by fixing errors made in the administration of the Coastal Barrier Resources Act in North Topsail Beach, NC.
- H.R. 2294 reauthorizes a program at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that ensures the most up-to-date science and data are in the hands of local decision makers. This ensures the protection of coastal communities and supports the many industries that operate in our marine waters.
- H.R. 3179 honors a young life cut tragically short and ensures Jocelyn Nungaray’s legacy is enshrined forever at the Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge. This legislation codifies President Trump’s Executive Order *Honoring Jocelyn Nungaray*, which he signed on March 4, 2025.

II. WITNESSES

Panel I

- **Members of Congress TBD**

Panel II

- **Mr. David Miko**, Acting Deputy Director of Operations, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC [H.R. 1885 and H.R. 3179]

Panel III

- **Ms. Alexis Nungaray**, mother of Jocelyn Nungaray, Houston, TX [H.R. 3179]
- **Dr. Stephan Howden**, Professor, University of Southern Mississippi, Stennis Space Center, Mississippi [H.R. 2294]
- **Dr. Rob Young**, Director, Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina [H.R. 1885] (*Minority Witness*)
- **Mr. Tom Leonard**, Alderman, Town of North Topsail Beach, North Carolina [H.R. 1885]

III. BACKGROUND**H.R. 1885 (Rep. Murphy, R-NC), “Town of North Topsail Beach Coastal Barrier Resources System Map Amendment Act of 2025”**

Enacted in 1982, the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) established the John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System (System), which consists of undeveloped coastal barriers and other areas of the eastern seaboard, the Great Lakes, U.S. Caribbean territories, and the Gulf of America.¹ CBRA restricts the use of new federal funding that may encourage development on or around certain coastal barriers.² The intention of these restrictions is to “minimize the loss of human life, wasteful expenditure of federal revenues, and the damage to fish, wildlife, and other natural resources associated with the coastal barriers.”³ CBRA is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the System currently encompasses 3.5 million acres.

In 2000, Congress passed the “Coastal Barrier Resources Reauthorization Act” (CBRRA), which included provisions defining whether a coastal barrier is developed or not when it is included in the System.⁴ The parameters included in that bill originated from a 1982 proposed rulemaking entitled, “Federal Flood Insurance Prohibition for Undeveloped Coastal Barriers; Proposed Identification and Submission of Report to Congress,”⁵ which has served as a guideline for USFWS CBRA mapping efforts, even though it was never finalized. Under CBRRA and the proposed rule, the Secretary must consider if:

- The density of development is less than one structure per 5 acres of land above mean high tide; and

- There is no existing infrastructure consisting of:
 - a road, with a reinforced roadbed, to each lot or building site in the area;
 - a wastewater disposal system sufficient to serve each lot or building site in the area;
 - electric service for each lot or building site in the area; and
 - a freshwater supply for each lot or building site in the area.⁶



Figure 1: The Boundaries of Unit L06

Source: WCTI News Channel 12

H.R. 1885 would require the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to remove the areas of North Topsail Beach, North Carolina, that are located within CBRA Unit L06, which, according to local zoning ordinances, are for purposes other than conservation as of the date of enactment of this Act.

The original CBRA maps, adopted in 1982 and amended in 1990, include sections of North Topsail Beach, NC, in the System's Unit L06, which the town has long disputed.⁷ According to the town, they meet the criteria set out by the CBRRA that prevent these areas from being considered undeveloped coastal barriers.

When areas were determined for CBRA designations in 1982, aerial pictures were used to assess areas under consideration. When the USFWS utilized aerial photographs of the area that now encompasses Unit L06, they could not determine the underground infrastructure at the site.

According to the town, "North Topsail Water and Sewer Corporation began constructing, operating, and maintaining water, sewer, and street treatment in 1979. These infrastructure improvements were available to each of the lots in the January 15, 1982, zoning maps."⁸ In addition to sewer systems, reinforced roads, electrical services, and water systems were in place within L06 by 1982.⁹



Figure 2 An approximate map of the areas that would be excluded (shaded in orange) from Unit L06 by H.R. 1885 | Source: Town of North Topsail Beach

Separately, in 2021, the USFWS transmitted a map for Unit L06 that makes minor and technical corrections, removing about 2.5 acres from the System.¹⁰ The Bolstering Ecosystems Against Coastal Harm (BEACH) Act codified this map into law in the 118th Congress.¹¹

H.R. 2294 (Rep. Ezell, R-MS) To reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of 2009.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) work in our nation’s marine waters—preparing for and responding to disasters, protecting coastal resources, supporting energy production, or managing federal fisheries—requires the most up-to-date science and data to advise decisions. One of the ways NOAA achieves this objective is through the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS),¹² a program within NOAA’s National Ocean Service that exists as a public-private partnership of coastal observation systems that seeks to collect data to improve this work. IOOS is made up of radar, gliders, buoys, vessels, and different models and forecasts¹³ that collect data points to inform decision-making along our nation’s coasts and in marine waters. This information improves operations for the businesses and industries that operate in our marine waters, supports military operations, and assists in responding to natural disasters like floods and hurricanes.

IOOS operates along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, the Gulf of America, the Great Lakes, Alaska, the Pacific Ocean, and the Caribbean.¹⁴ Operating in partnership with 11 regional associations allows IOOS to partner with the local communities. It is designed to help develop new technologies and expertise and increase information sharing to accomplish this work.



Figure 3 IOOS Region Map | Source: Integrated Ocean Observing System

For example, in the Gulf of America, the Gulf of America Coastal Ocean Observing System (GCOOS) has deployed a glider program that protects communities along the Gulf Coast.¹⁵ GCOOS’ Glider Dashboard¹⁶ is able to take the data that these gliders collect and publish it on its website to be available in real time. This dashboard contains data like salinity, current depth, and water temperature.¹⁷ Similarly, in the Pacific Northwest, the Northwest Association of Networked Ocean Observing Systems (NANOOS) is made up of more than 70 different entities to assist with coastal management, maintenance of the region’s estuaries, and tracks similar data for fishing communities and the ports that operate in the region, among others.¹⁸

While NOAA’s work on these issues has been ongoing for decades, IOOS was formally authorized by Congress in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (P.L. 111–11).¹⁹ Authorizing this program formalized the structure and process for IOOS to collaborate with national and regional partners and other federal agencies to carry out this work.

H.R. 2294 reauthorizes this program at its current authorization level of \$56 million per fiscal year (FY) from FY 2026 through 2030.

H.R. 2860 (Rep. Larsen, D-WA) “Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2025”

In 1998, Congress authorized the Northwest Straits Advisory Commission as part of P.L. 105–384.²⁰ This Commission was created to respond to public resistance to a national marine sanctuary that was proposed in the region. It is focused on proactive engagement as local communities work to protect their marine resources.²¹

Notably, advocacy from local leaders caused the sanctuary proposal to be dropped.²² P.L. 105–384 authorized the Secretary of Commerce to collect data on marine resources in the Northwest Straits, coordinate activities to protect and restore these resources, and carry out activities identified in the Northwest Straits Citizens’ Advisory Commission Report to the Secretary of Commerce in 1998.²³

In reauthorizing this entity, H.R. 2860 provides more specificity regarding the commission’s membership. It would require that members of certain counties’ marine resources committees be appointed and that the Department of the Interior and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission appoint two members. It also allows the Governor of Washington State to appoint five members representing varying interests.

The bill requires the NOAA Administrator to appoint an employee to serve as a liaison between NOAA and the Commission, coordinating NOAA’s programs to achieve the goal of the Commission, which is defined as “to protect and restore the marine waters, habitats, and species of the Northwest Straits region to achieve ecosystem health and sustainable resource” by designing projects, offering recommendations to improve the Straits’ health, and partnering with entities like the Puget Sound Partnership along with Tribal entities.²⁴ To accomplish this goal, the Commission is directed to support local marine resource committees and other Federal, state, and local entities to protect these marine resources and provide a forum to discuss these issues. It also requires an annual report to Congress on the Commission’s activities and accomplishments in protecting the Northwest Straits’ marine resources.

H.R. 2860 authorizes \$10 million for FYs 2026 through 2031 to carry out this program and authorizes such sums as necessary starting in FY 2032 and moving forward.

H.R. 3179 (Rep. Babin, R-TX), To rename the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge located in the State of Texas as the “Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge”

Jocelyn Nungaray was a 12-year-old girl from Houston, Texas whose life was tragically cut short on June 16, 2024, when she was raped and murdered by two Venezuelan nationals who entered the U.S. illegally and are allegedly members of the Tren de Aragua gang.²⁵ Jocelyn’s death quickly garnered national attention and renewed calls for more stringent immigration policies.²⁶

To permanently commemorate Ms. Nungaray, known for her special affinity for animals, President Trump signed Executive Order (E.O.) 14229 on March 4, 2025. This order directed the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to change the name of the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge to the “Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge.”²⁷



Figure 4 Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge Sign |
Source: Department of the Interior

Alexis Nungaray, Jocelyn's mother, was a special guest of the President during his March 4, 2025, address to Congress. During his speech, the President said:

*One thing I have learned about Jocelyn is that she loved animals so much. She loved nature. Across Galveston Bay from where Jocelyn lived in Houston, you will find a magnificent national wildlife refuge. A pristine, peaceful, 34,000-acre sanctuary for all of God's creatures on the edge of the Gulf of America.*²⁸

On March 7, 2025, Secretary Doug Burgum signed a Secretary's Order to implement President Trump's E.O.²⁹ H.R. 3179, introduced by Representative Brian Babin on May 5, 2025, would codify the E.O. to ensure that this renaming cannot be overturned by a future administration without Congressional action.

Established in 1963 along the Texas coast of the Gulf of America, the refuge protects coastal marsh and prairie, providing habitat for migratory and resident waterfowl, shorebirds, and waterbirds.³⁰ In addition to serving as a sanctuary, it offers the public numerous opportunities for fishing, waterfowl hunting, and wildlife viewing, hosting more than 800,000 visitors a year.³¹ The refuge is managed by the USFWS and is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System.³²

IV. MAJOR PROVISIONS & ANALYSIS

H.R. 1885 (Rep. Murphy, R-NC), “Town of North Topsail Beach Coastal Barrier Resources System Map Amendment Act of 2025”

- Requires the Secretary of the Interior to remove areas of North Topsail Beach, North Carolina located within CBRA Unit L06 from the System. According to local zoning ordinances, areas within Unit L06 are for purposes other than conservation as of the date of enactment.

H.R. 2294 (Rep. Ezell, R-MS) To reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of 2009.

- Reauthorizes NOAA's Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System at existing funding levels from FY 2026 to 2030.

H.R. 2860 (Rep. Larsen, D-WA) “Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2025”

- Reauthorizes the Northwest Straits Advisory Commission at \$10 million for each of FY 2026 to 2031, and then as such sums for each FY thereafter.

H.R. 3179 (Rep. Babin, R-TX), To rename the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge located in the State of Texas as the “Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge”

- Codifies the renaming of the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge to the Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge.

V. EFFECT ON CURRENT LAW (RAMSEYER)

H.R. 2294

https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/bill-to-law_-_h.r._2294.pdf

H.R. 2860

https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/h.r._2860_ramseyer.pdf

¹ P.L. 97-348

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ P.L. 106-514

⁵ FR 47 35698, August 16, 1982. <https://archives.federalregister.gov/issue/1982/8/16/35671-35698.pdf#page=26>.

⁶ 16 U.S.C. Ch. 55

⁷ "Evidence of a Full Complement of Infrastructure, as defined by the Coastal Barrier Resources Act of 2000, in North Topsail Beach, North Carolina." Topsail Island Shoreline Protection Commission. https://naturalresources.house.gov/unloadedfiles/evidence_of_a_full_complement_of_infrastructure_in_north_topsail_beach.pdf

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, John H. Chafee Coastal barrier Resources System, Topsail Unit L06.

<https://www.fws.gov/cbra/projects/technical-corrections/37-023C-L06-Draft-Map.pdf>

¹¹ P.L. 118-117

¹² National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Integrated Ocean Observing System. About Us.

<https://ioos.noaa.gov/about/about-us/>

¹³ IOOS Association. Technologies and Tools. <https://ioosassociation.org/technologies-tools/>

¹⁴ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Integrated Ocean Observing System. Regions.

<https://ioos.noaa.gov/regions/>

¹⁵ Integrated Ocean Observing System. Gulf of America Coastal Ocean Observing System. <https://ioos.noaa.gov/regions/gecoo/>

¹⁶ Gulf of America Coastal Ocean Observing System. Glider Dashboard. <https://gandal.fcoos.org/#>

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Integrated Ocean Observing System. Pacific Northwest – NANOOS. <https://ioos.noaa.gov/regions/nanocos/>

¹⁹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Integrated Ocean Observing System. History.

<https://ioos.noaa.gov/about/ioos-history/>

²⁰ P.L. 105-483. Title IV – Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative.

²¹ Northwest Straits Commission. History. <https://www.nwstraits.org/about-us/history/>

²² *Id.*

²³ P.L. 105-483. Title IV – Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative.

²⁴ H.R. 2860. To reauthorize the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Act.

<https://www.congress.gov/119/bills/hr/2860/BILLS-119hr2860jh.pdf>

²⁵ "Department of the Interior Renames Anahuae National Wildlife Refuge in Honor of Jocelyn Nungaray," March 10, 2025.

<https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order-so-3425-renaming-anahuae-national-wildlife-refuge-honor-jocelyn-nungaray>

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ Executive Order 14229, The White House, March 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/honoring-jocelyn-nungaray/>

²⁸ "Remarks By President Trump in Joint Address to Congress," March 4, 2025.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/remarks/2025/03/remarks-by-president-trump-in-joint-address-to-congress/>

²⁹ Secretary Order 3425, U.S. Department of the Interior, March 2025, <https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order/so-3425-renaming-anahuae-national-wildlife-refuge-honor-jocelyn-nungaray>

³⁰ "Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge," U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/jocelyn-nungaray/about-us>

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON: H.R. 1885, TOWN OF NORTH TOP-SAIL BEACH COASTAL BARRIER RESOURCES SYSTEM MAP AMENDMENT ACT OF 2025; H.R. 2294, TO REAUTHORIZE THE INTEGRATED COASTAL AND OCEAN OBSERVATION SYSTEM ACT OF 2009; H.R. 2860, NORTHWEST STRAITS MARINE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2025; AND H.R. 3179, TO RENAME THE ANAHUAC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE LOCATED IN THE STATE OF TEXAS AS THE JOCELYN NUNGARAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

**Tuesday, May 20, 2025
House of Representatives,
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries,
Committee on Natural Resources,
Washington, D.C.**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:55 a.m., in room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Harriet Hageman.

[Chair of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Hageman, LaMalfa, Webster, Walberg, Ezell; Hoyle, Dingell, Min, Elfreth, Rivas, and Huffman.

Also present: Representatives Babin, Murphy; and Larsen.

Ms. HAGEMAN. The Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will come to order.

Good morning, everyone. I apologize for being late. I just got out of a conference meeting, and so I appreciate everyone's patience.

I want to welcome the members who are here, the witnesses, and our guests in the audience at today's hearing.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

Under Committee rule 4(f), any oral opening statements and hearings are limited to the Chair and the Ranking Member. I therefore ask unanimous consent that all other members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that the Congressman from Texas, Dr. Babin, the Congressman from North Carolina, Dr. Murphy, be allowed to participate in today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

We are here today to consider four legislative measures: H.R. 1885, the Town of North Topsail Beach Coastal Barrier Resources System Map Amendment Act of 2025, sponsored by Representative Murphy of North Carolina; H.R. 2294, to reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of 2009, sponsored by Representative Ezell of Mississippi; H.R. 2860, the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2025, sponsored by Representative Larsen of Washington; and H.R. 3179, to rename the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge located in the State of Texas as the Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge, sponsored by Representative Babin of Texas.

I now recognize myself for a 5-minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. HARRIET HAGEMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WYOMING

Ms. HAGEMAN. Today the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will examine four bills.

Our first bill, sponsored by Congressman Babin, would honor the life of Jocelyn Nungaray by codifying the renaming of the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge in Chambers County, Texas to the Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge. This is an exciting day.

It is important to note that just last week the Senate passed companion legislation by voice vote, and it is my hope that the House moves quickly to pass this important legislation to honor Jocelyn. We are honored to have her mother with us here today.

The second bill, sponsored by Congressman Murphy, promotes responsible development of coastal communities by fixing errors made in the administration of the Coastal Barrier Resources Act, or CBRA, in North Topsail Beach, North Carolina. This legislation would remove approximately 590 acres of the 5,865 acres that encompasses CBRA Unit L06 in North Topsail Beach.

The areas being removed by this legislation are some of the most developed areas in the entire CBRA system. And given the success of CBRA in disincentivizing development elsewhere and the clear evidence of long-standing full complement of infrastructure, it is clear these lands should have never been a part of the CBRA system in the first place. The town of North Topsail Beach has been working with Congress for many years to address this issue, and I hope this hearing is a significant step towards finally coming to a resolution.

The third bill under consideration is sponsored by Congressman Ezell, and it would reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act administered by NOAA. The Integrated Ocean Observation System, or IOOS, equips local decision-makers with the most up-to-date science and data, ensures that coastal communities are protected from and prepared for disasters, and supports the many industries that operate in our marine waters.

Our last bill, sponsored by Congressman Larsen, reauthorizes the Northwest Straits Advisory Commission. The Commission was first authorized by Congress in 1998 to respond to public resistance to a national marine sanctuary that was proposed in the region. Since its creation the Commission has made efforts to protect and restore marine resources in the Northwest Straits. Unfortunately, our colleagues across the aisle have once again decided to ignore one of their own bills.

Ms. HAGEMAN. And with that I want to take time to thank our witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to a robust conversation.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. SARAH ELFRETH, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MARYLAND

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, Madam Chair, and while I appreciate the Subcommittee for considering the bills before us on the development of coastal communities and reauthorization of

programs at NOAA, there is a much larger and more urgent conversation this Subcommittee needs to have with the representatives of the Administration here today on the extreme overreach of the Executive Branch.

My district is home to the Mid-Atlantic Fish and Wildlife Office and the Fish and Wildlife Services. The work that these dedicated civil servants, scientific experts, and leaders in environmental protection conduct at these sites and around the Nation is critical not just to my district, but obviously, ecosystems and communities across this Nation. It is also required by law. Federal statute clearly outlines the responsibilities of agencies like Fish and Wildlife to comply with and implement laws passed by Congress.

Further, Article I of the Constitution makes clear that Congress holds the power of the purse, and the executive branch's job is to allocate the funding that Congress duly appropriates. The framers of the Constitution intended for each branch to hold a healthy level of distrust with the other branches of government in order to prevent any concentration of power in a single branch and to ensure balance of authority. As such, it is the responsibility of Congress to provide oversight and accountability to branches that overstep boundaries of their power. And we have seen this Administration overstep time and time again.

I am open to having any honest conversation about how we can collectively make government more effective and efficient at delivering key services for the American people, but that is not what is happening in this moment. This Administration has taken a sledgehammer to agencies without any strategy or reason when the American people would have been better served by a scalpel and a clear plan.

In one of his first directives this term, President Trump ordered a wide-sweeping freeze of Federal funds in January. This applied to money already appropriated by Congress, which is, as we have established, well beyond the scope of the President's authority.

In another executive order the President directed agencies to eliminate existing grants and deny future applications that in any way address the very real challenges of climate change and environmental justice. Some of the funds frozen from the Department of the Interior under this Administration include youth conservation programs that provide opportunities for young people to experience our natural resources hands-on, invasive species programs that protect habitats and native species from predatory invasive wildlife, historic preservation programs that ensure the unique stories of our cultures and communities are told for generations to come, and the list goes on full of projects that this Committee and our constituents care deeply about.

And that is not all. In February the Department of the Interior unilaterally and illegally fired over 2,000 Federal employees, including hundreds of civil servants at Fish and Wildlife. In March, we learned that Interior intends to close 150 field offices across this country, displacing even more dedicated public servants and irrevocably harming the Department's ability to do its statutory duties. It was only when the courts got involved that this Administration and leaders of Interior were forced to walk back some of those actions.

Federal courts have made it clear that the executive branch does not have the power to subvert Congress by freezing funds or firing Federal civil servants without cause.

So now we must ask ourselves: How is it possible for Fish and Wildlife to do all of this work, which is required by law, with a skeleton workforce and nowhere to physically work?

I think everyone here knows that that is not possible, so this Administration has a decision to make. Do they continue firing, freezing and restructuring funds and agencies, or will they fulfill their constitutional obligations to uphold the law?

I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will deliver on our shared responsibility to hold the executive branch accountable and join me in a productive conversation with this Administration.

Ms. ELFRETH. Before I yield back, Madam Chair, if I could ask unanimous consent that Representative Emily Randall from Washington and Representative Rick Larsen from Washington have permission to sit on the dais and participate in today's hearing.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So ordered.

Ms. ELFRETH Thank you. And with that I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I will now introduce our first panel. And, as is typical with legislative hearings, the bills' sponsors are recognized for 5 minutes each to discuss their bills.

Unfortunately, due to several travel complications, Congressman Ezell is not able to be here this morning, and I ask unanimous consent for his opening statement to be made part of the hearing record.

Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I now recognize Congressman Murphy for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. GREGORY F. MURPHY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

Dr. MURPHY. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you for allowing me to testify today. This is a statement on H.R. 1885. I would like to state that sometimes the government makes mistakes, and it is our job to fix them. This issue is not about whether coastal land should be developed. It is about correcting a 43-year-old Federal mapping error made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. My predecessor tried this for several years to get this error corrected unsuccessfully. I am hopeful this Committee will correct this soon.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wrongly designated the north end of Topsail Island, which comprises the town of North Topsail Beach, as being in the CBRA system, despite the fact it was already under development and had a great deal of infrastructure in the ground already. When areas were determined for CBRA designations in 1982, aerial pictures were used to assess the areas under consideration. When the U.S. FWS utilized aerial photographs of the area now encompassing Unit L06, they could not determine the underground infrastructure that was at the site.

According to the town, North Topsail Water and Sewer Corporation began constructing, operating, and maintaining water,

sewer, and street treatment in 1979. These infrastructure improvements were available to each of the lots in January 15 of 1982 zoning maps. In addition to sewer systems, reinforced roads, electrical services, and water systems were in place within L06 by 1982.

My bill would correct this error by taking out a small area of the CBRA system that is called L06. The amount of acres is approximately 590 acres.

I want to be clear that we have tried to address concerns that my Democratic colleagues have had on improving the language in this version of the bill, which clearly describes which areas within North Topsail Beach my legislation would remove.

The town of North Topsail Beach has provided extensive information about the existence of the infrastructure prior to the ruling by CBRA. This error wrongly prohibited the town of North Topsail Beach and many homeowners from accessing Federal programs, including the National Flood Insurance Program, the VA Administration loans, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers shore protection projects. So again, the error prevented the citizens of the town from accessing Federal programs.

And today you hear testimony from my constituent, The Honorable Mayor Pro Temp Tom Leonard, who will give you a great deal of information on this matter. The mayor pro temp has worked on this issue for decades, and is the epitome of a public servant. He is a retired Marine who has served for 30 years active duty and Reserve duty.

This is about just and fair treatment under the law. Areas that were already under development when the John Chafee Coastal Barrier Resource System Law passed in 1982 were not supposed to be designated within the CBRA system. The Federal Government made an error within North Topsail Beach, and the error just needs to be corrected.

Lastly, the Fish and Wildlife Service has visited the site to see exactly the area that needs to be corrected.

Again, this issue is not about whether coastal land should be developed; this issue is about righting a wrong made by the U.S. Government.

I appreciate everyone's consideration, and I am looking forward to working with you and members of the Committee to move this bill forward.

Dr. MURPHY. Thank you. I will yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I now recognize Congressman Larsen for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. RICK LARSEN, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WASHINGTON**

Mr. LARSEN. Thank you, Chair and Ranking Member, for holding today's hearing and inviting me to provide testimony on H.R. 2860, the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act.

I also want to thank my colleague, Representative Emily Randall, for her work co-leading this bill, as well as Senators Murray and Cantwell for their partnership in the Senate.

So the Northwest Straits Initiative started as a bipartisan, home-grown idea. Thanks to the foresight and hard work of Democratic Senator Patty Murray, former Republican Representative Jack Metcalf, my predecessor, and local stakeholders, Congress created the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Commission in 1998. The Commission works with seven county-based Marine Resources Committees, or MRCs, in northwest Puget Sound. Five of those seven MRCs are in the five counties that I represent in Northwest Washington State.

Over the past 27 years the Northwest Straits Commission has done important work to protect and restore the marine ecosystem of the Northwest Straits Region. This is a bottom-up initiative completely focused on locally-driven priorities, just as it was designed 27 years ago. The Commission's work ensures local communities and Tribes have the resources and expertise that they need to keep marine habitats healthy and recover endangered and threatened species, including orcas and salmon. This this includes working with the Island County MRC to restore shoreline at Cornet Bay and Hoypus Point; the Whatcom County MRC to conserve Olympia oysters, the only oyster species native to the Puget Sound; the San Juan and Skagit MRCs, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, local ports, and other stakeholders to hold vessel recycling and turn-in events before vessels become derelict or abandoned in Puget Sound; and the Snohomish County MRC to monitor bull kelp beds and hold workshops for local communities. These are important plant species in the Puget Sound that are an indicator of the health of the water.

Not only does the Northwest Straits Initiative help protect the Pacific Northwest environment, it also is important to the State's economy. According to the Commission, the Northwest States region contributes to 16,000 jobs in Washington's commercial and recreational fishing industries and \$150 million in economic output for the State's aquaculture industry.

The Commission works closely with ports, local authorities, State agencies, marine-based businesses, and Tribes on everything from trapping invasive European green crab that threatened local shell-fish economies to helping boaters identify and communicate eelgrass locations which are poor Anchorage sites and important for commercial and recreational marine species.

Finally, I just want to again reiterate this is crucial, locally-driven, job-creating work that Congress should continue to support. The bill, 2680, would permanently reauthorize the Northwest Straits Initiative and authorize \$10 million in funding annually for the next 5 years. It has bicameral support. Senators Murray and Cantwell introduced the bill in the Senate, and the Senate Commerce Committee successfully marked the bill last month on a bipartisan basis.

So in closing, I want to thank the Subcommittee here and the staff here, as well as Chair Westerman and Ranking Member Huffman of the full Committee for working with my office to reauthorize the Northwest Straits Initiative. I look forward to working with the Committee on the bill to restore marine habitat, protect Washington State's environment, and create more jobs in northwest Washington State.

Mr. LARSEN. And with that I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, and I now recognize Congressman Babin for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. BRIAN BABIN, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS**

Dr. BABIN. On June 17, 2024, Jocelyn, a beautiful, vibrant 12-year-old girl with her whole life ahead of her, was brutally murdered in north Houston, Texas. This senseless tragedy shook our community to its very core. Just days later, thanks to the swift and coordinated efforts of the City of Houston and Federal law enforcement, several Venezuelan nationals in the country illegally, suspected members of the violent Tren de Aragua gang, designated as a foreign terrorist organization, were apprehended and charged in connection with this heinous crime. Both men had been released into our homeland because of the Biden administration's reckless catch-and-release policies. Joe Biden and Alejandro Mayorkas's open border policies failed Jocelyn. We cannot allow such a thing to ever happen in this country again.

In commemoration of Jocelyn's life, President Trump signed Executive Order 14229 on March the 5th, 2025, directing that the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge be renamed to honor Jocelyn's memory. The legislation before you today will permanently codify this change into law.

Jocelyn's murder was a devastating reminder of the consequences of an unsecured border and the duty of the Federal Government to protect its citizens. Renaming this refuge not only honors Jocelyn's love for animals and the outdoors also ensures that her beautiful spirit will live on in a place of peace and life, a stark contrast to the evil that took her from us far too soon.

The Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, located just a short drive from Jocelyn's hometown of Galveston, is a cherished habitat for countless species and a beloved destination for Texans and visitors alike, and naming the refuge after Jocelyn is a fitting way to honor her love for animals and preserve her spirit within the Texas landscape that she called home.

Jocelyn's mother, Alexis, is here today over here, I see her in the corner.

Thank you, Alexis.

She is here today with us. She traveled here all the way from southeast Texas. Alexis is one of the strongest mothers that I have ever met. No parent, no person should ever be asked to go through an ounce of what life has thrown her way. Her strength in the face of unimaginable loss is why we say, "Never again. No more innocent lives stolen. No more families shattered by open borders." I was proud to stand with Alexis, Jocelyn's brother Elias, and other members of Jocelyn's family at the renaming ceremony for the wildlife refuge hosted in late April, and I am very proud to be with her here again today.

This bill is about more than renaming a wildlife refuge, ladies and gentleman. It is about demanding accountability, restoring order at the border, and putting Americans first. We must not, we cannot allow another American family to endure what Jocelyn's family has suffered.

I urge the House to take up H.R. 3179 for a markup, and I am hopeful the House can pass this bill so that we can swiftly get it to President Trump's desk.

Dr. BABIN. Thank you, and I yield back, Madam Chairwoman.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member of the Committee, Mr. Huffman, for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. JARED HUFFMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. I want to just say a few words about H.R. 1885.

North Topsail beach is really the poster child for the Coastal Barrier Resources System.

It has one of the highest coastal hazard profiles on the entire East Coast. More than 97 percent of the town is located in a FEMA special flood hazard area. It is exactly the kind of place that should be in CBRA, which is why it has been since 1982. It is the kind of situation that CBRA was created to address.

CBRA doesn't prohibit development. It is important to remember that. It simply says taxpayers won't be forced to subsidize risky development in places that are likely to flood, erode, and require repeated Federal bailouts, and that policy has worked. CBRA has saved taxpayers at least \$9.5 billion, with billions more projected in future savings by avoiding reckless spending in flood-prone areas. It has protected wildlife habitat, preserved natural storm buffers, and helped communities build resilience in the face of sea level rise and intensifying storms.

But despite these safeguards, such as prohibitions on Federal flood insurance, developers in North Topsail chose to build homes and businesses in these dangerous areas anyway in a known, high-risk zone without Federal subsidies. And now, now as they are facing frequent storms and shoreline retreat, unfortunately, but maybe not surprisingly, they want to bail out. And that is what H.R. 1885 is. It would shift the cost of this risky development onto the backs of Federal taxpayers and, really, potentially unravel the entire CBRA system.

This bill would remove nearly all land not locally zoned for conservation from CBRA, undermining the very law Congress just modernized and strengthened on a bipartisan basis through the recent BEACH Act. The bill before us today would take us backward by ignoring science, setting a dangerous precedent, and sending the wrong message at a time when coastal risks are only growing.

Next on the agenda H.R. 2294, a bill that would reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System. This is a vital program that delivers the invaluable data our communities rely on for everything from emergency preparedness to fisheries management. This is a bill that has broad bipartisan support, and for good reason. This program helps to track changing ocean temperatures, predict harmful algal blooms, monitor sea level rise, and more.

But the Trump administration's leaked OMB Fiscal Year 2026 budget passback actually proposes dismantling this program.

Regional IOOS systems could be shuttered, and staff are already being terminated. This would slash our scientific infrastructure. It is likely illegal, as well, as Congress specifically authorized IOOS. We should act quickly on this program before that authorization lapses.

And then we have H.R. 2860, which reauthorizes the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative. This successful program brings Tribes, local governments, scientists, and volunteers together to restore habitats and remove derelict fishing gear, protect marine species in Washington State. It is a shining example of what works, which is science-based, community-led conservation that delivers results.

So we definitely see bills reflecting two opposing paths, one before us that respects science, stewardship, and ecosystems, and another that would cater to political agendas, cynical rollbacks, and reckless developments, regardless of costs or consequences. As we delve into that, let's bear those contrasts in mind.

Mr. HUFFMAN. And I want to thank the Chair and yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. I want to thank all of the Members for their testimony, and I will now introduce the second panel.

Mr. Dave Miko, the Acting Deputy Director for Operations at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington, D.C.

Let me remind the witness that, under Committee rules, you must limit your oral statement to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony please press the button on the microphone.

And we use timing lights. When you begin the light will turn green. When you have 1 minute remaining the light will turn yellow. And at the end of the 5 minutes the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statements.

I now recognize Mr. Miko for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF DAVID MIKO, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mr. MIKO. Thank you and good morning, Chair Hageman, Representative Elfreth, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Dave Miko, the Acting Deputy Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Service's mission is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and provide the Service's testimony on two bills.

H.R. 1885 would revise the boundaries of a unit of the Coastal Barrier Resources System in North Topsail Beach, North Carolina. The system, including the unit in this bill, was established under the Coastal Barrier Resources Act of 1982, or CBRA. CBRA restricts certain Federal expenditures like flood insurance that can encourage risky development on barrier islands.

Coastal barriers protect communities from storms and erosion, support jobs in the fishing and recreation industries, and provide important habitat for fish and wildlife. CBRA designates relatively undeveloped coastal areas along the Atlantic, Gulf, and Great

Lakes as units of the system. CBRA does not impose regulatory burdens on landowners in the system. Landowners can build in accordance with local zoning laws, but without Federal subsidies. Studies have demonstrated that CBRA has saved taxpayers billions of dollars and will continue to do so in the future.

The Service maintains the official maps of the system, and we periodically make recommendations to Congress to make changes to unit boundaries. Congress can then adopt or reject these revised maps through legislation.

H.R. 1885 directs the Service to exclude certain areas from unit L06 of the system. Specifically, it would exclude each parcel in the town of North Topsail Beach that is designated by local zoning ordinances for purposes other than conservation. The Service estimates that this would remove over 1,000 acres from unit L06, as well as roughly 600 structures and potentially hundreds of additional mobile homes and vacant lots. These areas and structures would then be able to access a number of Federal subsidies.

The Service appreciates Alderman Leonard's graciousness in hosting the Service on a tour of the area last year. The Service values our relationship with local communities where we work and always appreciate the opportunity to hear firsthand from them.

Unit L06 has been reviewed by the Service, Congress, and the courts a number of times since 1982. Notably, in 2018, Congress enacted modernized maps for unit L06. The maps were passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump.

H.R. 3179 renames Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge in Texas to the Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge. This bill codifies President Trump's executive order to honor Jocelyn, the 12-year-old girl from Houston whose life was tragically cut short in June 2024.

I know we are joined today by Jocelyn's mother, Alexis, and I want to extend my condolences to Alexis, her family, and all those who knew and loved Jocelyn. I am deeply sorry for your loss.

Jocelyn is remembered by her friends and family for her kindness, her empathy, and zeal for life, as well as for her love for animals. She was especially passionate about ensuring that animals had natural homes in which to live. The President's action to honor Jocelyn's memory is fitting, as this wildlife refuge provides important habitat for a wide variety of fish and wildlife species. The refuge protects more than 39,000 acres of pristine coastal marsh and prairie. It is a sanctuary for waterfowl and shorebirds. It supports huge flocks of migrating snow geese, and it hosts more than 800,000 visitors a year, providing excellent recreational opportunities. It is a place where Americans of all ages can immerse themselves in nature and make lasting memories on our Nation's public lands.

H.R. 3179 would enshrine the name of Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge in law. The service supports H.R. 3179 which ensures the refuge will remain a tribute to Jocelyn's life and a place where her memory can live on with dignity and peace.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Miko follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAVID MIKO, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS,
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Good morning, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Dave Miko, and I am the Acting Deputy Director for Operations at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony on the following legislation: H.R. 1885, Town of North Topsail Beach Coastal Barrier Resources System Map Amendment Act of 2025; and H.R. 3179, To rename the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge located in the State of Texas as the “Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge”.

H.R. 1885, Town of North Topsail Beach Coastal Barrier Resources System Map Amendment Act of 2025

H.R. 1885, Town of North Topsail Beach Coastal Barrier Resources System Map Amendment Act of 2025, would revise the boundaries of a unit (Unit L06) of the John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS) in North Topsail Beach, North Carolina.

CBRS Background

The CBRS was established under the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) of 1982, which designated privately-owned areas along the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of America coasts as units of the CBRS. CBRA does not impose any regulatory burden on landowners in the CBRS. However, most new federal expenditures and financial assistance, including federal flood insurance, are prohibited in CBRS units. Congress’ stated objectives in enacting CBRA were to save lives, save taxpayer dollars, and restrict new federal expenditures and financial assistance in coastal barrier habitat, using a free-market approach to conservation. Coastal barriers and associated wetlands protect inland coastal communities from erosion and coastal storms and support American jobs in the fishing, recreation, and outdoor tourism industries. They are important spawning, nursery, nesting, and feeding habitat for fish and wildlife.

As President Reagan noted upon signing CBRA into law, “This legislation will enhance both wise natural resource conservation and fiscal responsibility. It will save American taxpayers millions of dollars while, at the same time, taking a major step forward in the conservation of our magnificent coastal resources,” adding that “[CBRA] will not prohibit a property owner from building on his property, and it will not impose federally mandated duties on State or local governments. Instead, it simply adopts the sensible approach that risk associated with new private development in these sensitive areas should be borne by the private sector, not underwritten by the American taxpayer.”

Multiple studies have since demonstrated that CBRA is effective at meeting these objectives. A 2019 study found that CBRA reduced federal coastal disaster expenditures by \$9.5 billion between 1989 and 2013 and forecasted that additional savings will range between \$11 and \$108 billion by 2068 (in 2016 dollars). A 2024 study found that the CBRS significantly reduces flood claims to the National Flood Insurance Program, generating an estimated savings to the federal government of an additional \$930 million per year.

The Service is responsible for administering CBRA, including maintaining and updating the official maps of the CBRS, making recommendations to Congress for changes to the boundaries, and consulting with federal agencies that propose to spend funds within the CBRS under the exceptions provided in CBRA. It is the purview of Congress to consider and adopt, where it chooses to, the Service’s recommended map revisions into law. Since the passage of the original CBRA in 1982, Congress has adopted CBRS maps produced by the Service a number of times through legislation, expanding the CBRS and improving the accuracy of maps. Today, the CBRS is comprised of 3.8 million acres of coastal barrier land and associated aquatic habitat along the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of America, Great Lakes, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico coasts.

H.R. 1885 and Unit L06

Under H.R. 1885, the Secretary of the Interior would be required to update the existing maps to exclude from Unit L06 of the CBRS each parcel in the Town of North Topsail Beach, North Carolina, that is designated by local zoning ordinance for purposes other than conservation as of the date of enactment. The Service estimates that if this legislation were enacted it would remove 1,087 acres (516 acres

of “uplands” and 571 acres of wetlands) from this CBRS unit. This constitutes 70 percent of the uplands within Unit L06. The bill would remove approximately 600 structures and potentially hundreds of additional mobile homes/travel trailers from the CBRS designation and many vacant lots. These areas and structures would then be able to access a number of federal subsidies.

The designation of Unit L06 has been thoroughly reviewed by the Service, Congress, and the Judicial Branch a number of times in the past, including adoption of revised maps, and multiple public review and comment periods. This includes:

- 1982—Unit L06 was established by the enactment of CBRA in 1982. The original CBRS maps, including Unit L06, were developed following a years-long process involving reviews of aerial photography, on-the-ground inspections, public information sessions, and two comment periods.
- Mid 1982–1985—Following a lawsuit over the designation of Unit L06, the District Court decided in favor of the federal government in 1984. After the case was appealed, the lower court’s decision was upheld in 1985.
- 1990—As part of a CBRA reauthorization effort, all the CBRS units, including Unit L06, were reviewed again by the Department of the Interior (Department), including a public comment period, in the mid–1980s. Congress then reaffirmed and expanded Unit L06 with new maps in 1990 when it reauthorized CBRA.
- 2016–2018—The Service reviewed Unit L06 as part of a pilot project directed by Congress to assess modernizing the CBRS maps. The pilot project, which was subject to public review and comment, produced revised modernized maps for Unit L06 that were transmitted to Congress in 2016 and then adopted by Congress via the Strengthening Coastal Communities Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115–358), signed into law by President Trump on December 21, 2018. These maps made appropriate technical corrections to address mapping errors (removing about 78 structures from the CBRS) and added approximately 170 qualifying acres to the CBRS (mostly wetlands).
- 2024—To correct a minor technical error in one of the maps of Unit L06, the Service produced a revised map that was enacted as part of the Bolstering Ecosystems Against Coastal Harm Act (Pub. L. 118–117).

As a general practice, the Service does not recommend removal of areas from the CBRS unless there is clear and compelling evidence that a technical mapping error led to their inclusion within the CBRS, in line with House Report 97–841 Part 1. The Service recognizes that while it is our responsibility under CBRA to maintain the official maps and conduct technical reviews, it is Congress’ purview to adopt or reject revised maps through the legislative process.

The Service notes as a technical matter that while H.R. 1885 refers to one Unit L06 map, effective implementation would require updates to two L06 maps. However, we note that many roads and open water areas within the town that are not individually parceled would remain in the CBRS. Additionally, due to the provision in H.R. 1885 stating that the bill applies only to areas of the Unit that are within the municipality of the Town of North Topsail Beach, there are some private residential properties (including structures) and other areas in unincorporated Onslow County that would also remain within the Unit.

H.R. 3179, To rename the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge located in the State of Texas as the “Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge”

H.R. 3179 renames the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in Texas to the Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge. Jocelyn Nungaray was a 12-year-old girl from Houston, Texas, whose life was tragically cut short in June 2024. She is remembered by her friends and family for her kindness, empathy, and zeal for life, as well as her love for animals. She was especially passionate about ensuring that animals had natural homes in which to thrive.

To honor Jocelyn’s memory, on March 4, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14229, “Honoring Jocelyn Nungaray,” directing the Department to rename the Refuge in Jocelyn’s name. Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum signed Secretary’s Order 3425 on March 7, 2025, to provide further implementation instructions to the Service. The Service has since updated maps, signage, and documentation to reflect the name change. On April 24, 2025, Secretary Burgum and Service leadership were honored to join Jocelyn’s loved ones, Governor Abbott, and Congressman Babin at a ceremony officially dedicating the Refuge as the Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge.

The Refuge is a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, a national network of lands and waters that conserves fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the benefit of present and future generations. For more than 60 years, the Refuge has served as a haven for wildlife and people along the Texas coast of the Gulf of America, making it a fitting tribute to Jocelyn and her love for animals. It protects approximately 39,000 acres of pristine coastal marsh and prairie, providing a sanctuary for migratory and resident waterfowl, shorebirds, and waterbirds. It supports huge flocks of migrating snow geese, sometimes numbering more than 80,000. The Refuge also hosts more than 800,000 visitors a year and provides excellent opportunities for fishing, waterfowl hunting, paddling, and wildlife watching. It is a place where Americans of all ages can immerse themselves in nature and make lasting memories on our nation's public lands.

H.R. 3179 would codify Executive Order 14229 and enshrine the name of the Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge in law. The Service supports H.R. 3179, which ensures the Refuge will remain a tribute to Jocelyn's life and a place where her memory can live on with dignity and peace.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HON. DOUG LAMALFA TO MR. DAVID MIKO, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. Miko did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Question 1. We are continually faced with infrastructure changes (such as removing dams, putting fish ladders in, and other fish passage measures.) We are often told that hatchery fish are regularly not included, or their populations are not counted for meeting fish population goals at those sites.

What is the difference between hatchery fish and regular fish? Is there a qualitative difference between the hatchery fish and fish that would naturally be in that particular river?

When Fish and Wildlife studies fish populations for river health, dam removal, or other goals where or how do hatchery fish factor into that equation compared to non-hatchery fish?

Is there a weighting process for population numbers, are the hatchery fish in that system counted the same as fish already in the system? Do they count 1:1?

Question 2. In 2020, the Trump administration finalized a rule that delisted the gray wolf, except for the Mexican wolf, and returned management to each of the lower 48 states. There is broad support for this move across parties and from Congress. We need wolf delisting, and we need it as soon as possible.

Can you provide insight into the possible wolf delisting efforts and timelines and if the Service plans to recommend delisting?

Do you have clear recovery numbers for the wolf populations and benchmarks for population targets?

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HON. JARED HUFFMAN TO MR. DAVID MIKO, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. Miko did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Regarding the administration proposal to transfer Protected Resources from NOAA to DOI:

Question 1. Are you aware that Congress assigned specific responsibilities to the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of the Interior in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)?

1a) Are you aware that Congress has not authorized the Secretary of the Interior to implement portions of the MMPA and ESA that have been assigned to the Secretary of Commerce?

Question 2. Will Interior be prepared to handle the transfer of protected resources from NMFS to DOI without new resources or staff?

2a) Will the Administration transfer personnel to cover such transferred responsibilities?

Question 3. Will the Administration transfer funding from NOAA to Department of Interior (DOI) to cover the additional costs associated with the additional responsibilities?

3a) If so, when does the Administration plan to start transferring funding?

Question 4. Given Interior's current staffing levels and budget, how does the Department plan to absorb additional ESA and MMPA responsibilities without receiving new resources or congressional appropriations?

Question 5. Is this an action that the Administration plans to carry out without Congressional authorization or approval?

5a) If so, when does the Administration plan to start transferring functions?

Regarding H.R. 1885:

Question 6. Would removing Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS) protection invite further development in high-risk zones and increase future demands on the Army Corps of Engineers, FEMA, and National Flood Insurance program? Please provide examples of the federal investments anticipated if HR 1885 is enacted.

Definition of Harm Rescission:

Question 1. Do you agree that the Endangered Species Act protects endangered and threatened species against harm?

Question 2. Does it harm a wild animal to destroy the place where it lives?

Question 3. Congress created a robust permitting system in the Endangered Species Act to allow economic activities that may incidentally take listed species go forward so long as that take is minimized and mitigated. This permitting system provides regulatory certainty to permittees. Won't rescinding the definition of harm sow confusion here for businesses and interfere with the incidental take permitting system that Congress created?

Consultations:

Question 1. Given the unprecedented mass firings and retirements, how does the Service plan to handle consultations moving forward? Won't the lack of staff substantially delay consultations?

God Squad:

Question 1. Globally, how many species are at risk of extinction?

Question 2. The president has put out an executive order to attempt to increase the use of the 'God Squad.' How many projects can you identify that have resulted in a jeopardy opinion with no reasonable and prudent alternative over the last 10 years? Please provide a list to the Committee.

Question 3. What is the actual need for the use of the 'God Squad' when there is arguably zero evidence that the ESA halts federal projects and permits in their tracks?

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HON. ADAM GRAY TO MR. DAVID MIKO, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. Miko did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Question 1: Mr. Miko, how can Congress work with both President Trump and Governor Newsom, who have each issued their own Executive Order on California water, to prevent overreach?

Question 2: In the final days of the Biden Administration the EPA settled a lawsuit with an environmental litigant regarding Phase 1 of Bay-Delta Water

Quality Control Plan in California which triggered ESA consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, along with the National Marine Fisheries Service. What is the status of this and the status of your agency's efforts?

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HON. SARAH ELFRETH TO MR. DAVID MIKO, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. Miko did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Question 1. How many employees have been fired, laid off, put on administrative leave, or taken the "fork in the road" resignation payout from the Fish and Wildlife Service since January 20, 2025?

Question 2. Has the Fish and Wildlife Service completed the Reduction in Force and restructuring plans required by the Administration? If so, please attach a copy for Congressional review and oversight.

Question 3. Has the Administration, the Secretary of the Interior, or your superiors at the Fish and Wildlife Service provided guidance on policies and procedures for the reinstatement of wrongfully terminated employees ordered to be reinstated by the courts? If so, what guidance was provided to you and by whom?

Question 4. How many Fish and Wildlife Service offices does the Department of Interior intend to close and how many staffing positions have been cut from local and regional field offices?

Question 5. You stated that the Fish and Wildlife Service is in the process of hiring staff to work on invasive species mitigation. However, this Administration has ordered a federal hiring freeze. With this freeze in place, are you able to hire necessary staff, permanent or seasonal? If so, how many does the Fish and Wildlife Service anticipate hiring by the end of 2025?

Question 6. What specific challenges are permit seekers and federal partners facing due to reductions in FWS Ecological Services staffing, particularly in field offices?

Question 7. How does the ongoing reduction in field biologists and permitting staff align with the Administration's stated goal of streamlining permitting and improving regulatory consistency?

Question 8. What is the current average processing time for Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs), listing petitions under Section 4, and interagency consultations under Section 7 and 10? How does this compare to the average time frames in FY24?

Question 9. Given the significant staffing reductions, does the Service believe it can still meet the scientific integrity and statutory deadlines laid out in the National Listing Workplan?

Question 10. Are there currently any active plans or internal discussions at the Service to mitigate delays in permit processing, HCP development, or ESA consultations caused by staffing losses? If so, please share the plan.

Question 11. Which specific Fish and Wildlife Service grant programs are being eliminated or consolidated under the FY26 budget proposal? Please provide a list with FY25 funding levels for each program.

Question 12. Have ongoing project delays contributed to confusion or frustration among developers, permittees, or conservation stakeholders relying on timely decisions from the Service?

Question 13. Does the reduced staffing capacity compromise the Service's ability to uphold scientific rigor, particularly in peer-reviewed status assessments and recovery planning?

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HON. DEBBIE DINGELL TO MR. DAVID MIKO, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. Miko did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

The Commission pays for the implementation of the program by passing Congressionally provided money to the USFWS for habitat and lamprey control

programming. Sounds simple enough, yet it seems that the USFWS levies a 22% overhead cost on this program for administrative purposes, despite the Commission already handling the administrative work.

Question 1. Mr. Miko, how can Region 5 justify this additional cost given that the Commission already pays for administration? Can you provide me with a detailed listing of precisely what you do with this 22%?

Question 2. Mr. Miko, in the 2025 House Report Language, thanks to Representative Stefanik, Region 5 received \$1million for sea lamprey control intended to match the GLFC's contribution on Lake Champlain. Will you confirm that the USFWS will direct at least this \$1 million to the Region for this purpose in 2025?

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HON. JULIA BROWNLEY TO MR. DAVID MIKO, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. Miko did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Question 1. Has the Service tracked the number of overdue Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing determinations, critical habitat designations, and five-year reviews over the past five months?

1a) How has that backlog changed since the February 14 staff terminations?

Question 2. With fewer listing and recovery experts at FWS, how will agencies assess species decline across their range?

Question 3. Now that many recovery teams have been disbanded or frozen, what steps is the Service taking to uphold accountability, transparency, and progress toward recovery plans outlined in finalized recovery plans?

Question 4. Will the Service meet statutory deadlines or produce scientifically credible Species Status Assessments under current staffing levels?

4a) Are these assessments still undergoing rigorous peer review?

Question 5. Is it true that FWS has lost ~50% of its Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) team?

5a) If so, how many positions were lost, and how many remain?

5b) How is the loss affecting permit reviews, developer guidance, and Section 7 consultations?

Question 6. Are you aware of the loss of field technicians impacting recovery programs for Mexican Gray Wolf, Red Wolf, Black-Footed Ferret, or Northern Spotted Owl?

6a) Please provide a list of field activities (population monitoring, captive releases, habitat management) that have been paused or canceled because of staff terminations, early retirements, fork-in-the road resignations, and other programs reducing staff since January 20, 2025.

Question 7. Is the agency currently tracking missed or delayed recovery actions under finalized recovery plans? How many actions are overdue?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you for your testimony, and I will now recognize members for 5 minutes each for questioning. I am going to start with Mr. Miko.

Dr. Babin's legislation helps to highlight the importance of the National Wildlife Refuge System itself. However, we know the refuge system faces serious management challenges. Last Congress the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was granted Good Neighbor Authority to help better manage the refuge system. However, the authority was lumped in under the existing Good Neighbor Authority. The authority for the Service was lumped in under the existing Good Neighbor Authority with the BLM and the Forest Service.

Could you outline for the Subcommittee how specifically tailoring Good Neighbor Authority to fit the Service's unique needs would help better manage the refuge system?

Mr. MIKO. Yes. Thank you, Congresswoman, for the question, and we certainly appreciate the inclusion of the Good Neighbor Authority for the Service, and it provides us additional tools in our toolbox to work closely with our partners or key constituents in our wildland fire work and, in enhancing and protecting habitats in our National refuge system.

We have some needs for some clarity in the legislation, in the language, to help us better understand the direction and to utilize the tools in that toolbox to put conservation on the ground and would appreciate an opportunity and support an opportunity to work closely—with the Committee.

Ms. HAGEMAN. But there are some tweaks that need to be made to make it so that it works better for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Is that fair?

Mr. MIKO. That is fair.

Ms. HAGEMAN. All right. What is this Administration doing to increase hunting and fishing access in the refuge system?

And will providing greater access to hunters and anglers be a priority going forward?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, thanks for the follow-up question on our refuge system and its opportunities to provide access for fishing and hunting and other recreation opportunities that we know is a high priority for this Administration. And we appreciate the opportunity to utilize our 573 wildlife refuge systems, as well as the 72 national fish hatcheries to allow access for hunting and angling and other opportunities for recreation on those lands.

We recently published our Hunt Fish Rule that we publish every year that opens up opportunities across our system and, across the country to allow hunter, and angler access, and other bird-watching types of activities.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Was there an announcement made just last week along those lines about how to increase the access for hunting and fishing?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, there was.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. And who made that announcement?

Mr. MIKO. I am not absolutely positive on who made the actual announcement of that, Congresswoman.

Ms. HAGEMAN. But it came out of your office.

Mr. MIKO. Correct, it did.

Ms. HAGEMAN. And could you explain just a little bit more about it?

Mr. MIKO. We go through about an 18-month process to work with the communities, and through the refuge system to identify additional opportunities, for hunting and angling and other recreational opportunities that fit within the refuge system. That process goes through a public comment period. We receive that public comment back, we review those comments, and then make recommendations to open up those lands.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. In light of this Administration taking actions around the Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge, how is the Service working to encourage youth visitation to the refuge system?

Mr. MIKO. So the Service certainly respects and cherishes our position, and our unique position to allow access and provide opportunities for youth to engage in recreation and conservation on and across our refuge system. We host about 69 million visitors nationwide annually on our wildlife refuge system. The Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge itself receives about 800,000 visitors.

We have specific programs that engage youth, including our Youth Game Warden program that introduce teens to the interest of conservation law enforcement. That refuge also sponsors the Junior Duck Stamp Program, which introduced youths K through 12 to migratory bird conservation through art and science.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. Well, thank you for that.

And with that I yield back, and I now call on Ms. Elfreth for 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Miko. First of all, I want to start and say thank you for, I believe, 30 years of service to our Nation, and I appreciate that.

I also want to take a moment and thank everybody at Fish and Wildlife, those who are still there and those who were, frankly, illegally terminated by this Administration. I want to just say to them that I see you and I appreciate you.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the firings and then move on to some of the closures. And I am really glad for this long-overdue discussion, particularly because a number of members of this Subcommittee have sent letters requesting responses, and I just want to highlight that we are still awaiting many of those responses. So please be more responsive so we can endeavor to do this work together.

So I will start. This Administration has fired hundreds of thousands of civil servants across the Federal Government. And at Fish and Wildlife we believe the number is around 400 employees in February. And as I mentioned, there is an intention to close 150 field offices. Congress has not been informed on the official number of civil servants terminated, nor have we been consulted on the mass closures of those offices. And I believe, based on the Chair's remarks, we share a common goal to make sure that Fish and Wildlife is there for our constituents and has every access opportunity for our constituents to enjoy the refuge system, everything that taxpayer dollars have invested in.

So can you tell me how many employees have been fired, laid off, put on administrative leave, which means they are being paid by taxpayers but not working, or taken the fork-in-the-road resignation payout from Fish and Wildlife since January 20?

Mr. MIKO. Thank you, Congresswoman, for the question.

What I can share is that the Fish and Wildlife Service is working hard to implement the desires of the Administration to lean into becoming a more effective and efficient organization. We have, as you mentioned, 30 years of experience in civil service throughout my career, and I can say to you that I have never seen a more dedicated group of Federal employees at the Fish and Wildlife Service that come to work every day to lean into the work, to meet the

mission of the agency, to meet the Administration's priorities, and we stand ready to continue to do so.

Ms. ELFRETH. And I believe all agencies were required to submit reduction in force or restructuring plans. Assuming this was done for Fish and Wildlife, when do you intend to consult Congress and this Subcommittee on those plans?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, I appreciate the follow-up question.

Given my newness to the position as Acting Deputy Director, I have not been involved in those conversations.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK. I would suggest that it is impossible for the Subcommittee to exercise its oversight role without that coordination and cooperation, so I would ask that we dig into that.

Thankfully, our judicial branch has stepped in to reinstate many of these employees who were illegally fired. But again, unfortunately, Congress has not been provided any information from this Administration on the number of impacted Federal employees.

There has also, we understand, been some pretty contradictory emails sent to employees from nameless Federal officials that contain typos and conflicting instructions on when to show up, not show up, whether they be on administrative leave and paid, whether they can keep paying their mortgages, for instance.

So has this Administration or the Secretary of the Interior or your superiors at Fish and Wildlife provided guidance on policies and procedures for the reinstatement of wrongfully-terminated employees that have been ordered to be reinstated from these courts?

What kind of clear directions have been given to folks who were illegally terminated?

Mr. MIKO. So we have been following court orders to reinstate the probationary employees, and brought those employees back into employment with the Fish and Wildlife Service as directed.

Ms. ELFRETH. And will we be honoring their service to date, or are we requiring them to start their clocks anew on their probationary status?

Mr. MIKO. To be honest, I would have to check with the HR. I don't understand the details of those.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK, I would greatly appreciate a follow-up to that.

Mr. MIKO. I am happy to follow up.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you. And then lastly, I want to touch on just the great work that your field offices do, particularly as they are public-facing and front-facing, much like our district offices back home in our districts. These field offices play a critical role in land conservation, endangered species protection, issuing permits for hunting and fishing, supporting the health of our fisheries nationwide.

But I understand, again, your goal of closing 150 field offices without consultation to this Congress or this Committee. So how can you assure me or us that you can fulfill your mission, particularly on the public side, by closing 150 field offices?

Mr. MIKO. I thank you for your follow-up and, again, I appreciate your concern.

We have got, again, a very dedicated staff working to become a more efficient, more effective organization to deliver on the mission and the priorities of this Administration.

Ms. ELFRETH. But if people have to travel hundreds or thousands of miles to actually take advantage of the services their taxpayer dollars are paying for, I am confused as to how you can fulfill your mission by closing those field offices.

Madam Chair, I want to say I would look forward to continuing this conversation at some point. And with that I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Mrs. Dingell for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to start by thanking the Chair for including H.R. 2294 as part of today's hearing. This bill, which I am a proud original co-sponsor of, will reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System. And I want to thank my friends and colleagues, Representatives Ezell and Bonamici, for leading on this important issue.

The Integrated Ocean Observing System, or IOOS, is a part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or, as we call it, NOAA. It is an integrated network of 11 federally certified regional associations that observe America's ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes. One of the IOOS's regional associations, the Great Lakes Observing System, or GLOS, is based in my district in Ann Arbor. GLOS conducts critical work, including protecting the public from harmful algae blooms and providing important weather forecast data to keep boaters safe, to delivering essential information about the broader Great Lakes ecosystem.

NOAA's IOOS is one of the many incredible institutions working to strengthen our understanding of the Great Lakes and protect them, and that is why I am disappointed that someone from NOAA is not in attendance today to speak to NOAA's important work and why the Administration's decisions are so alarming. I know I am not alone in my serious concerns with the Administration's plans to gut the agency, and the impact that this will have on the Great Lakes. I believe we must be doing all we can to support the Great Lakes. It is more than 20 percent of the fresh water in the world.

So having said that, I want to take the opportunity to discuss another entity that is critical to the region, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. The Great Lakes Fishery Commission is a binational commission made up of representatives from the United States and Canada to effectively manage and protect the Great Lakes. In particular, the Commission coordinates and funds a program to manage sea lamprey, which is a parasitic fish that has invaded the Great Lakes system. And the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service implements the program in the Great Lakes. If left unchecked, the continued growth of sea lamprey would devastate our fish populations and threaten species that are vital to both the natural environment and the livelihoods of those who rely on fishing in the Great Lakes.

However, since February 14, the Administration has created several challenges to the effective execution of the control program, including demands to fire, not hire, and then to recall several key personnel at the Fish and Wildlife Service required for implementing the program. Consequently, and this is serious, the

sea lamprey control program has been left reeling, and it is now behind schedule.

So Mr. Miko, how has the Interior Department consulted with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to ensure staffing disruptions would not delay the implementation of the vital sea lamprey program?

And can you confirm that staffing decisions were taken only after consulting with your partner, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, who coordinates and pays for the program?

Mr. MIKO. Thank you for your question, Congresswoman, and I absolutely understand and appreciate the concern and seriousness of sea lamprey control. As a member of Pennsylvania and a Great Lakes State, I understand the impact that sea lamprey can certainly have on those populations.

We have great relationship with the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission. They are a wonderful partner and support us in the work that we do. I am happy to report that we are in the process of hiring our seasonal employees to institute the sea lamprey control program, and are looking forward to meeting our goals for treatment this year.

Mrs. DINGELL. So you promise me you are going to meet those goals?

Mr. MIKO. We are working very hard to hire our staff, and are looking forward to meeting those goals.

Mrs. DINGELL. Can you tell me, Mr. Miko, how the Interior Department is ensuring that staff firings will not result in the loss of critical expertise in implementing the control program?

Mr. MIKO. So I appreciate that, and I don't know the details with respect to individuals' expertise within region 3 of the Fish and Wildlife Service. But once again, I assure you that we are working hard to hire those staff and maintain the delivery and expectations and goals of that program.

Mrs. DINGELL. Madam Chair, I have more questions but not enough time to ask them, so I am going to, if I can, submit questions for the record.

Mrs. DINGELL. And I am really going to tell you these sea lamprey could destroy our Great Lakes. So it is really important that we continue to manage them.

So thank you, and I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, Representative. The Chair now recognizes Mr. LaMalfa for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Madam Chair, I appreciate it.

Welcome, Mr. Miko. I am glad to be able to speak with you today. I wanted to take it in a little different direction here, too, as well, with the gray wolf situation we have in Northern California since their introduction here. I have a couple of thoughts on that, too.

First, this isn't even the wolf that would have at one time been native here, a Canadian gray wolf. Can you explain to me how they have decided that using whatever wolf that is available and plugging them into these various regions, whether it is Northern California or Colorado or other areas where the evidence in the past showed it wasn't even this type of wolf, but instead a much bigger, stronger, more deadly wolf, how was the decision made to

just introduce whatever wolf is available instead of something that would have been closer to what might have been native at one time?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, thank you for your question, Congressman. And unfortunately, my background and my work with the Service up until 4 weeks ago was within the Fish and Aquatic Conservation Program. Those decisions were made before my role as Acting Deputy Director.

Mr. LAMALFA. Is that something you might be able to track down a little bit, and submit to this Committee at a later time? Would you mind doing that?

Mr. MIKO. I would be happy to reach out to our Federal experts and get back with you and your staff.

Mr. LAMALFA. All right. I do appreciate that. Because it has been a pretty big loser for the people and the populations that are up there. The wildlife are being devastated.

I mean, I could show you graphic pictures right here. I don't have a poster of them, but from a distance it shows an elk having been killed right at someone's edge of their building on their property. And just the back end of the elk just eaten out. It was a horrible death for that elk.

And right here, here is somebody's front door. This is their front porch right here, where evidently, an elk must have been seeking respite from humans because of how it must have felt in danger there, killed right on there and drug off, right on someone's front porch.

It is not playing well in my part of the State, nor, I think, for Colorado. I will let those colleagues speak for that.

So a delisting needs to move forward rapidly. We have tens of thousands of the same gray wolf in upper Midwest States and Canada. It is not like the wolf is endangered by any common-sense measurement.

Let me shift to fish populations for a moment here. The Klamath River in the northern part of my district, as well, we faced a long-time onslaught on four hydroelectric dams that make clean, CO₂-free green power being on the hit list, and finally they got their way here last year of those dams being removed.

But during the time, there had been a successful hatchery downstream of those four dams that introduced many millions of fish. So what we are often faced with is that the departments and agencies are not counting those hatchery fish for meeting fish population goals at these or other sites, and even other types of fish for, in this case, these salmon.

So what is the difference between hatchery fish and regular fish in the eyes of the agency?

Mr. MIKO. I appreciate that question, Congressman.

Hatchery fish are brought on station or spawned on station in support and to supplement wild populations. The Service does its very best to maintain genetic vigor, or the fish's ability to survive in the wild through a broad genetic management plan. But oftentimes those fish that are raised and produced in facilities are inferior at this point to wild fish, and do not survive as easily or as readily in the wild as hatchery fish.

Mr. LAMALFA Interesting, because they have captured wild fish in the past, and harvested the eggs from those fish, and then they have simply just propagated those eggs so they have a much higher ratio of success of hatch and raised up to an age where they have a better shot at getting down the river and returning to the ocean and then coming back later. Why would that be seen as inferior?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, I can appreciate the follow-up. I would have to really get back with staff and understand the full differences between those genetic challenges that we face.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK. So when the hatchery or any fish are returned, I don't know how they tell the difference when it comes back up, are they not weighted as counting as a fish?

Is it a one-to-one ratio, somehow they can discern the difference between the wild fish and hatchery fish if they return from the ocean? Are they counted equally?

Mr. MIKO. We are able to tell the difference. We tag, through a tagging program, fish that are reproduced at hatcheries and released into the water.

Mr. LAMALFA. They are tagging millions of fish.

Mr. MIKO. We are tagging millions of fish.

Mr. LAMALFA. How long does that take?

Mr. MIKO. I don't have the exact dates on those. We use tagging units that tag millions of fish daily.

Mr. LAMALFA. Yes, OK. I don't know why they need to be tagged. A returning fish is a returning fish. Same species, genetically no difference. It almost sounds like a setup designed to fail on counting populations and what a successful population recovery looks like.

So with that I am over time, Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Ms. Rivas for 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. RIVAS. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Miko, thank you for what you do to manage fish and wildlife resources and public trust for people today and for future generations. I am incredibly worried about how recent cuts from Trump and Musk's DOGE efforts, coupled with legislation like H.R. 1885, will put more people into harm's way and impact our future generations' ability to enjoy our wildlife and coastal resources.

Can you discuss how increased development along our coast can lead to the destruction of our ecosystems and increase the rate of climate change?

Mr. MIKO. So I appreciate the question. I am not an expert in coastal barrier restoration efforts, and in those processes that are put in place.

We do know that coastal resources provide habitat for fish and wildlife, and benefit inland communities from storm surges. I apologize, but I would be happy to get back to you with more details on that question.

Ms. RIVAS. OK, great. So my district, and like many others, have seen firsthand how climate change and climate disasters can impact communities and take years to rebuild. In Los Angeles we recently had two big wildfires, the Eaton and Palisades, that impacted our communities and, have a total damage and economic loss of between \$250 to \$275 billion.

Per NOAA's Office of Coastal Management, the 2024 hurricane season resulted in \$182 billion in damages, higher than the average over the past 5 years. Can you speak to how DOGE's unjust mass firings are impacting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's ability to conduct environmental permitting that is required by law to protect threatened animals and habitats?

Mr. MIKO. I appreciate the follow-up.

What I can say is that every day I am impressed by the dedication of the Fish and Wildlife employees, and they are working hard to create and identify efficiencies, use innovation to continue to meet the mission of the agency and the Administration's priorities.

Ms. RIVAS. But with the firings, are they causing delays in environmental permitting?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, again, I appreciate the follow-up, and I do not have the information on timing at this point. Again, with my newness in the position, I don't know what timing was prior to what it is at the moment.

Ms. RIVAS. OK, then I will follow up with you to get that answer, because I can't imagine you are able—that the teams are able to continue to do this work if you are losing that many employees.

Mr. MIKO. I would be happy to follow up with you.

Ms. RIVAS. OK. As I mentioned in my opening, I am concerned about how my Republican colleagues and Trump's plans to fire staff, sell public lands to the lowest bidder, and prioritize polluters' profits over the well-being of our communities will cause irreversible damage to wildlife, habitats, and our safety.

Thank you, and I yield back to the Ranking Member.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, Representative.

Mr. Miko, I want to follow up on the line of questioning just now, but also from my colleague from Michigan. When she asked you about invasive aquatic species, which is also a grave challenge to my district which borders the Chesapeake Bay, you mentioned that you are going to be hiring people to address the lamprey issue. But I understand that this entire Administration is currently under a hiring freeze. So can you help me understand how you are going to meet the mission and meet this moment while you are cutting employees and you can't hire anybody new?

Mr. MIKO. I appreciate that question.

I don't know the details of the hiring practices to allow staffing of our seasonal employees for this program, but I can certainly get back to you on those details.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK. I think we have a lot to get back to in terms of details. I appreciate you are fresh in this role, not fresh to the Department, but these are really concerning and, I think, bipartisan challenges that we are facing here based on permitting delays, as Ms. Rivas said, or controlling invasive aquatic species, which is different species but a challenge for communities and districts across this country. So I would really appreciate a lot of follow-up in person, I am happy to meet, or in writing, which we are happy to submit.

And I will yield back, Madam Chair.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Walberg for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. WALBERG. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Mr. Miko, for being here.

Coming from the Great Lakes, and especially having a district that runs from Lake Michigan to Lake Erie, invasive species are a significant concern for us. And having spent time on the Asian carp problem for a long time now, having visited the Brandon Road Interbasin Project on at least one opportunity, I am focused on this invasive species issue of great concern.

Recently, President Trump signed a memorandum directing his Administration to implement the necessary measures to prevent the migration of invasive carp into the Great Lakes basin, which would destroy so many things, recreation as well as fisheries, in the Great Lakes. And I applaud the President for his swift action to protect the Great Lakes.

My question is, how is the Fish and Wildlife Service planning on carrying out this direction from the President, and what regulatory barriers might exist that would prevent a rapid response from taking place, if necessary?

Mr. WALBERG. Thank you for your question and interest in invasive species. We also appreciate President Trump's interest and support in that effort.

We understand that the Great Lakes support over \$5 billion recreation and commercial interest to the United States, supports over 35,000 jobs, and those are threatened by the advancement of Asian carp in the system.

We are working closely with our Federal partners, with States to conduct, commercial fishing efforts to fish back the leading edge of those invasive carp to keep them from moving closer to the Brandon Road Project to reduce the risk of those species getting introduced into the Great Lakes.

We have right now a pilot program, it is called a rapid response pilot program, it is in a pilot stage, that allows States to apply when they find a new invasion of a species so we can respond rapidly and quickly to that before those species become established, and eradicate those species where they are at their riskiest opportunity for eradication, before they become established and before we need to spend taxpayer dollars to combat and control like we are doing with Asian carp.

Mr. WALBERG. What type of enhanced monitoring programs do you have to carry out that, not only for Michigan, but for surrounding States, as well?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, monitoring is the key to identify those species early. We use tools such as environmental DNA to detect presence of DNA that may have been shed by those species. It doesn't tell us if they are there, but it tells us that their cell data is there, and allows us to then go in early and try to detect those species and then provide eradication efforts when they are found.

Mr. WALBERG. Well, over the past several years there have been instances of various Asian carp species found in Lake Erie and Lake Michigan, as well. And so that is what you are talking about. Because so far we have not had the worst impact from Asian carp in the Great Lakes, but that is how you are monitoring getting ahead of the game.

Mr. MIKO. Yes.

Mr. WALBERG. Well, keep at it. I appreciate that. This is a project that should have been completed some time ago. Having seen what is planned there, nothing is failsafe, but for too long we did nothing, and I am glad to see it working, so thank you.

I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, and I want to thank you, Mr. Miko, for your testimony, and for being here today, and for answering the members' questions.

The members of the Committee may have some additional questions for the witness, and we will ask you to respond to those in writing.

While the clerk is resetting the table, I will then go ahead and introduce our witnesses for our third panel today: we first have Ms. Alexis Nungaray, the mother of Jocelyn Nungaray, from Houston, Texas; Dr. Stephan Howden, a Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi in Stennis Space Center, Mississippi; Dr. Rob Young, a Professor at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina; and Mr. Tom Leonard, the Alderman of the town of North Topsail Beach, North Carolina.

Let me remind the witnesses that, under Committee rules, they must limit their oral statements to 5 minutes, but their entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony please press the button on the microphone.

And we use timing lights. When you begin the light will turn green. When you have 1 minute remaining the light will turn yellow. And at the end of 5 minutes the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statement.

I will also allow all witnesses to testify before member questioning.

I now recognize Ms. Nungaray for 5 minutes.

It is wonderful to see you. Thank you for being with us today.

**STATEMENT OF ALEXIS NUNGARAY, MOTHER OF JOCELYN
NUNGARAY, HOUSTON, TEXAS**

Ms. NUNGARAY. Hello. Good morning to the members of the House of Representatives. I really do appreciate everybody taking the time to hear my testimony and to share my story as to why I support Representative Babin's bill on H.R. 3179.

Well, I was a young mom, a teen mom. I had Jocelyn when I was just 15 years old, when my world changed for the better. Jocelyn did teach me I was no longer only standing up for myself, but for my daughter, as well. Me and Jocelyn grew up together. She gave me purpose to want to make it in this world because I had little eyes looking at me.

Jocelyn was incredibly bright. She had a smile that lit up a room, and a smile that was always contagious. From her quirky sayings to her unique wardrobe style, she had the biggest of dreams, from wanting to be a famous actress to wishing every lost animal to have somewhere to call home. Jocelyn's dreams were cut incredibly short when her life was ripped away from her by two illegal Venezuelans who were apprehended and released through our previous administration under their catch-and-release policy.

Jocelyn should have never encountered these two monsters. She should have been safe enough in her community to be walking a short distance from her home and make it back safely. Jocelyn was sexually assaulted, strangled to death. Her hands and her feet were bound, and she was left under a bridge in a bayou of water to rot like she was garbage. She was robbed of a future that we will never get to see come true.

It has been 11 months and 4 days since Jocelyn has physically been here on this Earth. It has been that long since I have felt the warmth of her hugs, and that long since I have seen her smile. Jocelyn's love for all outside creatures was truly unmatched. She has taken in injured pigeons, nursing them back to health, taken care of tree frogs and toads, all the way down to snakes and deer, not a care in the world what creature it was.

When President Donald Trump announced at the State of the Union address that he had placed an executive order to rename the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge to Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge, I was stunned, speechless, while being filled with an enormous amount of gratitude. Having the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge be renamed to Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge is such an honor to an amazing young girl who lived and breathed all things nature and wildlife creatures.

It breaks my heart to know that this tragedy had to happen to make some real changes happen, but it is also a beautiful reminder that there is such beauty that comes from great tragedy. Renaming the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge does not change the value or the integrity that it so greatly upholds, but instead it adds deeper meaning: love and peace in the memory of a brave 12-year-old Jocelyn Lisel Nungaray.

Thank you for your time.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Nungaray follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MS. ALEXIS NUNGARAY

Good morning to the members of the House of Representatives. I appreciate everyone taking the time to hear my testimony on why I support Rep. Babin on bill H.R. 3179. I was a teen mom, I had Jocelyn when I was just 15 years old when my world changed for the better. Jocelyn taught me I was no longer only standing up for myself, but for my daughter as well. Me and Jocelyn grew up together, she gave me purpose to want to make it in this world, I had little eyes looking up to me. Jocelyn was incredibly bright, she had a smile that lit up a room and a smile that was always contagious. From her quirky sayings to her unique wardrobe style, she had the biggest of dreams. From wanting to be a famous actress to wishing every lost animal to have somewhere to call home. Jocelyns dreams were cut incredibly short when her life was ripped away from her by two illegal Venezuelans that were apprehended and released through our previous administration under their "catch and release" policy. Jocelyn should never have encountered these two monsters. She should've been safe enough in her community to be walking a short distance from her home and make it back safely. Jocelyn was sexually assaulted, strangled to death, hands and feet were bounded and she was left under a bridge in a bayou of water to rot like she was garbage. She was robbed of a future we'll never get to see come true. It has been 11 months and 4 days since Jocelyn has physically been on this earth. It has been that long since I have even felt the warmth of her hugs, that long since I have seen her smile.

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Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge” I was stunned, speechless while being filled with an enormous amount of gratitude. Having the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge be renamed to Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge is such an honor to an amazing young girl who lived and breath all things nature and wildlife creatures. It breaks my heart to know this tragedy had to happen to make some real changes happen. But it is also a beautiful reminder that there is such beauty that comes from great tragedy. Renaming the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge does not change the value or integrity that it so greatly upholds, but instead adds deeper meaning, love and peace in the memory of a brave 12-year-old young girl, named Jocelyn Lisel Nungaray.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. She is always in our hearts.
I now recognize Dr. Howden for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF STEPHAN HOWDEN, PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY
OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI, STENNIS SPACE CENTER,
MISSISSIPPI**

Dr. HOWDEN. Good morning, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Elfret, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in strong support of the reauthorization of the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act, and thank you to Congressman Ezell for your leadership in supporting this important bill.

My name is Dr. Stephan Howden. I am a professor at the University of Southern Mississippi and Director of the Hydrographic Science Research Center. For over 20 years I have helped lead the Gulf of America Coastal Ocean Observing System, or GCOOS, one of the 11 regional components of IOOS.

IOOS is one of the most cost-effective, impactful Federal programs supporting our ocean, coast, and Great Lakes. It is a cross-sector, bipartisan success story. And reauthorizing it is not just smart policy; it is essential for public safety, national defense, economic growth, and resilience. Let me bring this home with a few examples from my own work in Mississippi and across the Gulf.

In 2005, just 8 months after we deployed our first ocean observing buoy off the coast of Mississippi, Hurricane Katrina hit. Our buoy was one of the only systems that survived, and it kept sending out vital wind data in real time as other infrastructure had failed. Those data weren't just useful, they were lifesaving.

Years later, during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, it was surface currents data from IOOS high frequency radars that helped NOAA model the spill dispersal and direct the clean-up. Without that regional capability, response efforts would have been slower, costlier, and less effective.

In recent years we have deployed ocean gliders, low-power autonomous vessels that measure the heat content in the upper ocean. Why? Because storm intensity is still the hardest part of the hurricane forecasting, and the temperature of the ocean is a major factor driving its intensity. It has been shown that these gliders are cost effective and capable of helping NOAA's National Hurricane Center improve intensity forecasts by up to 50 percent. That means more accurate warnings, better evacuations, and billions in potential savings. These are just a few examples of how this national program enables game-changing information for Ameri-

cans in the Gulf, and how our region, in turn, supports our Nation's economy and security.

IOOS works because of its structure. It combines strong Federal coordination and certification from NOAA with the flexibility of regional public-private partnerships that leverage capacities across sectors and are attuned to State and local communities. It ensures all data, whether from a buoy off the coast of Mississippi, a radar in Alaska, or a glider in the Caribbean meets rigorous Federal standards, and it shares these data freely and publicly with the National Weather Service, the Coast Guard, emergency managers, fishers, shrimpers, offshore energy operators, researchers, private industry, and more.

IOOS supports lifesaving search and rescue operations through the U.S. Coast Guard, marine navigation that helps move 1.6 trillion in foreign trade through U.S. ports, commercial and recreational fisheries and aquaculture that depend on real-time ocean conditions, and the next generation of ocean innovators train through university partnerships like our own at the University of Southern Mississippi, where we work closely with NOAA, the Navy, and entrepreneurs across the private sector. All of this, every buoy, radar station, glider, and data service and product rests on the foundation laid by the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act.

Reauthorizing this Act means preserving a system that delivers for communities across the country, rural and urban, inland and coastal. It means supporting smart and actionable, science-based decisions in the face of growing risks, and it means protecting one of the most trusted, nimble, and widely-used sources of ocean data in the world. IOOS is not just about science and data. It is about safety, sovereignty, and smart governance. Reauthorizing this critical law is a win for our Nation.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Howden follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. STEPHAN HOWDEN, PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI, STENNIS SPACE CENTER

Good morning Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Members of the Subcommittee.

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IOOS supports:

- Life-saving search and rescue operations through the U.S. Coast Guard
- Marine navigation that helps move \$1.6 trillion in in foreign trade through U.S. ports
- Commercial and recreational fisheries and aquaculture that depend on real-time ocean conditions
- And the next generation of ocean innovators—trained through university partnerships like ours at The University of Southern Mississippi, where we work closely with NOAA, the Navy, and entrepreneurs across the private sector.

All of this—every buoy, radar station, glider, and data service and product—rests on the foundation laid by the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act.

Reauthorizing this Act means preserving a system that delivers for communities across the country—rural and urban, inland and coastal. It means supporting smart and actionable, science-based decisions in the face of growing risks. And it means protecting one of the most trusted, nimble, and widely used sources of ocean data in the world.

IOOS is not just about science and data. It's about safety, sovereignty, and smart governance. Reauthorizing this critical law is a win for our nation.

Thank you—and I look forward to your questions.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, and I now recognize Dr. Young for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT YOUNG, DIRECTOR, PROGRAM FOR THE STUDY OF DEVELOPED SHORELINES, WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY, CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Dr. YOUNG. Thank you, Congresswoman, and thank you for the opportunity.

The 1982 Coastal Barrier Resources Act included a solid combination of science-based policymaking with a conservative, free-market approach to risk reduction and environmental conservation. It was strongly bipartisan, and continues to receive broad bipartisan support when reauthorized or amended.

Just last year, H.R. 5490, the Bolstering Ecosystems Against Coastal Harm, or BEACH Act, expanded the Coastal Barrier Resources System and reauthorized CBRA for another 7 years. It passed both the House and Senate by voice vote.

In addition, the Coastal Barrier Resources Act fits well with President Trump's March 19, 2025 executive order, "Achieving

Efficiency Through State and Local Preparedness.” This order extends the Trump administration’s goal of shifting the responsibility for many programs back to State and local government, and away from the Federal bureaucracy. The order proclaims, “It is the policy of the United States that State and local governments and individuals play a more active and significant role in national resilience and preparedness, thereby saving American lives, securing American livelihoods, and reducing taxpayer burdens.” CBRA does exactly that, and has been doing that for more than four decades.

The Coastal Barrier Resources Act did not and does not restrict the development of privately-held barrier island properties. The law simply limits Federal spending in those places. Our analysis shows that CBRA has saved \$9.5 billion in Federal disaster aid between 1989 and 2013, with projected savings of over \$100 billion by 2060. If you develop, you must incorporate the cost of managing your own hazard risk into that local economy. That is what CBRA tells us.

The science behind CBRA is clear. I am a coastal geologist. Barrier islands are predictably hazardous locations on which to develop, invest, or maintain infrastructure. They are subject to long-term shoreline erosion, significant and devastating storm impacts, and rapid changes along inlet shorelines. Many of this Nation’s barrier islands have been completely inundated by storm waters multiple times over the last three decades. Coastal hazards on these low-lying, sandy shorelines are different than other hazards like tornadoes or wildfires in that they have a significantly higher recurrence interval and we can, from a scientific perspective, precisely identify the areas that will experience repeat impacts.

The geologic setting of North Topsail Beach makes it particularly vulnerable to storms and long-term erosion. Our beach nourishment database indicates that North Topsail Beach has received almost 5 million cubic yards of sand for beach nourishment in 21 episodes since 1997. This is at a cost of approximately \$56 million, adjusted for inflation. The need for beach nourishment sand will only increase with time, as will the cost.

It is understandable that any municipality would prefer to pass this burden onto Federal taxpayers. At the moment, this desire is in conflict with the stated goals of the Trump administration to shift that responsibility to States and localities, and with the clearly expressed desire of Congress in passing the BEACH Act without these kinds of carve-outs just a few months ago.

There are many communities outside of the Coastal Barrier Resources System that do receive Federal funding for beach nourishment and other Federal projects. There are also many communities that are outside of the Coastal Barrier Resources System that have decided to fund their own beach nourishment projects.

I have tracked national coastal protection projects for more than 30 years. I believe that we are about to see a pendulum swing for all projects away from Federal dependence to local and State funding. The goal at the moment should be to assist those localities with the development of creative funding mechanisms and long-

term planning to reduce their own risk without the need for massive Federal expenditure. Fortunately, the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association has produced just such a guide.

My greatest concern regarding H.R. 1885 is that it would open the door to all municipalities within the Coastal Barrier Resources System to request removal of all lands not zoned conservation or some other broad criteria. Local zoning designations are not interchangeable with CBRA. Removing land from CBRA based on any local criteria would gut the Coastal Barrier Resources Act and add substantially to the Federal burden in funding the protection of coastal resort towns.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Young follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBERT S. YOUNG, PHD, PG, DIRECTOR, PROGRAM FOR THE STUDY OF DEVELOPED SHORELINES, WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY PHD, PG

(b) The Congress declares that it is the purpose of this chapter to minimize the loss of human life, wasteful expenditure of Federal revenues, and the damage to fish, wildlife, and other natural resources associated with the coastal barriers along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and along the shore areas of the Great Lakes by restricting future Federal expenditures and financial assistance which have the effect of encouraging development of coastal barriers, by establishing the John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System, and by considering the means and measures by which the long-term conservation of these fish, wildlife, and other natural resources may be achieved.

Coastal Barrier Resources Act, 1982

The 1982 Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) included a solid combination of science-based policy making with a conservative, free-market approach to risk reduction and environmental conservation. It was strongly bi-partisan, and continues to receive broad, bi-partisan support when reauthorized or amended. Just last year, H.R. 5490 the “Bolstering Ecosystems Against Coastal Harm (BEACH) Act,” expanded the Coastal Barrier Resource System and reauthorized CBRA for another seven years. It passed both the House and Senate by voice vote.

In addition, the Coastal Barrier Resources Act fits well with President Trump’s March 19, 2025 Executive Order “Achieving Efficiency Through State and Local Preparedness.” This order extends the Trump administration’s goal of shifting the responsibility for many programs back to state and local government and away from the federal bureaucracy. The order proclaims: *“It is the policy of the United States that State and local governments and individuals play a more active and significant role in national resilience and preparedness, thereby saving American lives, securing American livelihoods, reducing taxpayer burdens . . . ”* CBRA does exactly that and has been doing that for more than four decades.

The Coastal Barrier Resources Act did not, and does not, restrict the development of privately held barrier island properties. The law simply limits federal spending in those places. Our analysis shows that CBRA saved \$9.5 billion in federal disaster aid between 1989 and 2013, with an additional savings of up to \$108 billion by 2068 forecasted (Coburn and Whitehead, 2019). If you develop, you must incorporate the cost of managing your own hazards risk into the local economy.

The science behind CBRA is clear. Barrier islands are predictably hazardous locations on which to develop, invest, or maintain infrastructure. They are subject to long-term shoreline erosion, significant and devastating storm impacts, and rapid changes along inlet shorelines. Many of this nation’s barrier islands have been completely inundated by storm waters multiple times over the last three decades.

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increase with time as will the cost. It is understandable that any municipality would prefer to pass this burden on to federal taxpayers.

At the moment, this desire is in conflict with the stated goals of the Trump administration to shift that responsibility to states and localities and with the clearly expressed desire of Congress in passing the BEACH Act without these kinds of carve outs just a few months ago.

There are many communities outside of the Coastal Barrier Resources System that do receive federal funding for beach nourishment and other federal projects. There are also many communities outside of the CBRS that fund their own beach nourishment projects. I have tracked national, coastal protection projects for more than 30 years. I believe that we are about to see a pendulum swing for all projects away from federal dependence to local and state funding. The goal at the moment should be to assist localities with the development of creative funding mechanisms and long-term planning to reduce their own risk without the need for massive federal expenditure. The American Shore and Beach Preservation Association has produced just such a guide.

My greatest concern regarding H.R. 1885 is that it would open the door to all municipalities within the CBRS to request removal of all lands not zoned conservation or some other broad criteria. Local zoning designations are not interchangeable with CBRA. Removing land from CBRA based on any local criteria would gut the Coastal Barrier Resources Act and add substantially to the federal burden in funding the protection of coastal resort towns.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Leonard for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF TOM LEONARD, ALDERMAN, TOWN OF NORTH TOPSAIL BEACH, NORTH CAROLINA

Mr. LEONARD. Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Elfreth, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on H.R. 1885. This legislation would correct a mapping error made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over 40 years ago when it incorrectly designated the northern end of Topsail Island, now the town of North Topsail Beach, as a Coastal Barrier Resources Act, or CBRA, zone.

North Topsail Beach is one of three small towns located on Topsail Island, a 26-mile-long barrier island between Jacksonville and Wilmington, North Carolina, and adjacent to Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune. Due to our proximity to Camp Lejeune, many of our residents and visitors have a military connection, including myself, a retired United States Marine Corps officer with 30 years of service. Like you, North Topsail Beach plays an important role in the collective Federal, State, and local effort to preserve and maintain barrier islands.

As the primary law that protects barrier islands, CBRA is a law that we hold in the highest regard and with the greatest respect. As effective as CBRA has been collectively for the Federal Government, the taxpayers, and the environment, the application of the law in North Topsail Beach has not been wholly positive or successful. In fact, both North Topsail Beach and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognized the Topsail Unit L06 as one of the most developed CBRA system units in the United States.

Since CBRA has been overwhelmingly successful at deterring development, the question must be asked: Why did CBRA not deter development in North Topsail Beach?

Development continued in North Topsail Beach after the passage of CBRA because the town already had a full complement of

infrastructure in place before the enactment of CBRA in October 1982. Having a full complement of infrastructure is one of the two primary criteria that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service uses to determine if an area is developed and thus not eligible for inclusion in the Coastal Barrier Resources System, with the other being the density of development.

A full complement of infrastructure is defined by law as a road with a reinforced roadbed, a wastewater disposal system, electric service, and a fresh water supply, all of which must be sufficient to serve each lot or building site in the area. A thorough examination of records and documentation, which is summarized in my written testimony, shows that the north end of Topsail Island had a full complement of infrastructure that meets the requirements outlined in the Service's own guidance and the law.

Roadways have existed along the entire length of Topsail Island since the 1940s. In 1982 a zoning map shows that all lots on the northern end of Topsail Island had direct access to a road with a reinforced roadbed. Jones-Onslow Electric Membership Corporation has provided electrical service to the island since the 1940s. Maps supplied by Jones-Onslow show that even the most northern reaches of Topsail Island had electric service by 1980. North Topsail Water and Sewer was established in 1979 to provide water and sewer services to North Topsail. Onslow County began to construct its own water system to service the island in 1980. Records established that water and sewer utility lines ran to the northernmost reaches of the island by the end of 1981.

Hundreds of structures were built in North Topsail by the enactment of CBRA, and hundreds more were built in the years following, due to the substantial infrastructure investments made on the island by both public and private entities. There was so much growth in the area that in 1980 West Onslow Beach, which is now North Topsail Beach, was nominated as a statewide "growth center." It is clear that Congress did not intend to include the areas in CBRA with such significant on-the-ground infrastructure investment by private entities and local governments.

We agree with Congress, which said that, "An area which has full complement of infrastructure, some combination of roads, water, sewers, electrical lines, et cetera, but not structures suggest that the area is, as a practical matter, already developed." Being included in CBRA has no doubt had an impact on our community. Our residents cannot qualify for Federal flood insurance. Our town cannot apply for Federal grants and loans or name storm assistance. Our veterans cannot access federally backed mortgage products such as VA loans.

But H.R. 1885 is about equal treatment under the law, and is in no way an attempt to subvert CBRA. This bill just allows our community to be treated like any other community that was not mapped into CBRA, including the two other towns that are on Topsail Island.

On behalf of the town of North Topsail Beach, I urge you to support and approve H.R. 1885. Thank you again to the Subcommittee for this opportunity, to the Subcommittee staff for their generous engagement with our community, and to Represent-

ative Murphy who sponsored this important legislation, and Representative Rouzer for his steadfast support as a co-sponsor. [The prepared statement of Mr. Leonard follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Tom Leonard, LtCol, USMC(ret.)
Mayor Pro Tem, Town of North Topsail Beach, North Carolina**

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

"Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1885, H.R. 2294, H.R. 2860, and H.R. 3179."

May 20, 2025

Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on H.R. 1885, a bill to revise the boundaries of Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS) Unit L06 in North Topsail Beach, North Carolina. The legislation will correct a mapping error made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) over 40 years ago when it incorrectly designated the northern end of Topsail Island, now the Town of North Topsail Beach, as a Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) zone.

North Topsail Beach is one of three small towns located on Topsail Island, a 26-mile-long barrier island between Jacksonville and Wilmington, North Carolina, and adjacent to Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune. With a year-round population of just 1,005 (2020 Decennial Census), North Topsail Beach is a quiet, rural beach town. Due to our proximity to Camp Lejeune, many of our residents and visitors have a military connection, including myself, a retired United States Marine Corps officer with 30 years of service.

Like you, North Topsail Beach is passionate about protecting coastal barrier islands and their significant resources. We have a great responsibility in the collective federal-state-local effort to preserve and maintain these important natural resources. We will always remain committed to carrying out the purposes and objectives of the CBRA as an active partner with the federal government. As the primary law that protects barrier islands, it is a law that we hold in the highest regard. As the CBRA law rightly states, "coastal barriers contain resources of extraordinary scenic, scientific, recreational, natural, historic, archeological, cultural, and economic importance." The CBRA is a testament to the shared interest that the nation has in protecting coastal barrier islands and their "extraordinary" resources.

As effective as the CBRA has been collectively for the federal government, the taxpayers, and the environment, the application of the law in North Topsail Beach has not been wholly positive or successful. In fact, both North Topsail Beach and the Service recognize that CBRS Unit L06 is one of the most developed CBRS units in the country. The CBRA has been overwhelmingly successful at deterring development, so the question must be asked, "Why did the CBRA not deter development in North Topsail Beach?" Development continued in North Topsail Beach after the passage of the CBRA because the Town already had a "full complement of infrastructure" in place before the enactment of the CBRA in 1982. Having a full complement of infrastructure is one of two primary criteria the Service uses to determine if an area is developed and thus not eligible for inclusion in the CBRS, the other being the density of development. For this reason, the proposed mapping change will not set a new precedent for CBRS mapping

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The full document is available for viewing at:

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II13/20250520/118221/HHRG-119-II13-Wstate-LeonardT-20250520.pdf>

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, and I want to thank all of the witnesses for your testimony today. We are going to go to the members questioning for 5 minutes each, and I am going to begin with me.

Ms. Nungaray, I want to thank you so much for being here and sharing Jocelyn's story with us. I have had the opportunity to engage with you on several occasions as we have had to relive the terror and the horror that you have had to live with over the last year. And we all want to express our condolences, as well as to commend you for the strength and perseverance that you have shown.

Can you give the Committee just a few examples of Jocelyn's love of animals, and how that makes the renaming of this refuge so fitting?

Ms. NUNGARAY. I appreciate the condolences. The amount of support really does truly mean a lot to me and my family. I think that is what has gotten us through a lot of this hard, hard time in our lives.

But Jocelyn, her love for animals was unmatched, really. There was a time she took a pigeon into her room and didn't say anything, just a random street pigeon. And she swore that its legs were hurt and she was nursing it back to health. And it was wrapped up in a shirt of hers on her bed. And I don't know how long she had it there, how many hours, but she was like, "I am nursing it back to health. I have to save it. It is hurt."

She has brought in a Tupperware box, like a large tote that had about more than a dozen toads in it with dirt. She said she was making sure that they all had family together. She has rescued snakes. She has taken care of locusts, which I think are the ungodly creatures that make the ungodly noises.

[Laughter.]

Ms. NUNGARAY. But she loved everything about the outdoors. Every year we had an annual Frio vacation, where we would go out of town for a week and go into the wild and have a cabin and spend time with family. And she just lived outdoors, she found peace in the outdoors and just loved everything about it.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I have a niece that has a collection of 75 snails as her pets, and I would call her quirky, as well. I think that is a good word, but it is a very positive word.

Ms. NUNGARAY. Very positive. It makes them unique.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yes, it does.

Ms. NUNGARAY. But yes, she loved all animals. It didn't matter what it was. It could have been a pigeon, it could have been an animal. She had recently just taken in a new cat. My best friend wasn't able to keep her anymore, and she begged me for this cat, and she only got to have her for a week, before she passed. And within that week she just showed her so much love and care.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, I can't wait to visit.

Ms. NUNGARAY. It is beautiful. It truly has an ungodly amount of serenity there and peace. It's with peace.

Ms. NUNGARAY. Please visit. It is beautiful.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

Ms. NUNGARAY. Thank you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Mr. Leonard, do other communities on Topsail Island have similar CBRA issues to North Topsail Beach?

Mr. LEONARD. Thank you for the question. And no, they don't. The two other towns are not in CBRA, and they are geographically the same as North Topsail Beach. They are serviced by the same infrastructure as North Topsail Beach, but were not included in CBRA, in the CBRA system, because there were more structures on the ground at the time the analysis was done.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So, is this further evidence that the areas in question in Unit L06 should be removed from the CBRA system?

Mr. LEONARD. Again, thank you for your question. I believe that, yes, the fact that the two other towns on the island in addition to the southern half of our town are not in the CBRA shows the misapplication of the CBRA inclusion criteria back in the 1980s.

In my testimony I provide a reference from House Report 97-158 OBRA 1981, in which Congress explains that an area that has a full complement of infrastructure, some combination of roads, water, sewers, electrical lines, et cetera, but not structures suggests that the area is, as a practical matter, already developed.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, I appreciate your testimony in that regard.

And Dr. Howden, just very quickly, you have spent many years working on coastal issues along the Gulf region before the IOOS program was formally created by Congress in 2009. You also state in your testimony that IOOS works because of its structure. Can you talk about how the creation of IOOS as a formal program assisted in coastal protection efforts?

Dr. HOWDEN. Yes, thank you for the question.

Prior to IOOS, first of all, there wasn't the same infrastructure that there is now out in the coastal ocean. There was no high frequency radar network measuring surface currents over the coastal ocean, and there weren't gliders, there were fewer buoys out there.

And one of the real strengths of IOOS is the regional associations and the way the regional associations reach out to all the stakeholders in the communities and find out what their priorities are. And through a number of workshops and meetings, one of the key variables that kept coming up for fisheries or search-and-rescue or any number of topics was the need to know what surface currents are. So the build-out of the high frequency radar network is a real boon to coastal observing.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I appreciate that, and I now call on Ms. Elfreth for 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Nungaray, thank you very much again, and I am just in complete admiration of your strength and perseverance. And as a kid myself who used to collect tadpoles, your story and your daughter's legacy has a special place in my heart. And I pray that you and everybody who loved and knew Jocelyn will be able to find some peace and solace in the refuge. And hopefully, we will be able to pass this bill together.

Ms. NUNGARAY. Thank you so much, I appreciate it.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you. I would like to move on to Dr. Young.

Dr. Young, I represent a coastal community myself, of Annapolis. And I would suggest that a lot has changed in the 40 years since

this bill was passed. I wasn't even born. And we are seeing significant increases in all kinds of flooding, in sunny day flooding, nuisance flooding, but also storm surges. In my district alone we see over 50 days a year of flooding.

I am curious. I am not familiar with this particular community, but based on my own district's experience every day I am curious if you can speak to the specifics of increased flooding in the town of North Topsail.

Dr. YOUNG. Thank you for the question.

I didn't come here to pick on North Topsail Beach, but there are many communities on the East Coast, Gulf Coast of the United States of America that have seen a tremendous increase in vulnerability and exposure to coastal hazards over the last few decades, but in particular over the last 10 years.

North Topsail itself, the municipality, goes right up to the inlet. Tidal inlets are particularly dynamic places. They move constantly. The other end of Topsail Island, the inlet area, was just set aside for conservation. The development doesn't go all the way up to the inlet shoreline. So the community of North Topsail Beach does sit within a specially designated inlet hazard area that the State of North Carolina delineates for places that have that rapid inlet fluctuation.

Like many barrier islands, it is a low elevation community, and so it is not the only place on the East Coast of the U.S. that is seeing increased vulnerability. Our cities and many shorelines are. But it is in a particularly exposed location because of its inlet proximity, because of the width of the island, and because of the low elevation.

Ms. ELFRETH. I appreciate that. And I have a note here that the CBRA system has saved Federal taxpayers \$9.5 billion over the years, and expected, to your point, with increased flooding, will save tens of billions more as we move forward.

What is the worst thing that can happen here if this bill passes? What kind of increased development would this allow, and what kind of bill will the Federal taxpayers have to pay in the worst case scenario?

Dr. YOUNG. Well, my real concern is the language in the bill simply states that, the way I read it, whatever is not currently in CBRA that is not zoned conservation comes out. And if we extended that to all of the other municipalities that have some piece of land within CBRA, that is a terrible precedent. So we would be increasing the Federal tax burden not just for North Topsail Beach. I think we would be kidding ourselves if we were to pretend that, if this goes through, you are not going to see 10 or 12 similar bills in other similar locations next year, rapidly.

And I understand the claims that North Topsail has long made about the fact that they were incorrectly included in the Coastal Barrier Resources System. I have not made that determination myself, and I am not here to argue that, but I will say that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has adjudicated that complaint under numerous administrations, as has Congress in the past, and has denied that particular claim.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you very much.

And Mr. Leonard, first of all, thank you for your service to this Nation, and thank you for your service as a local government official. It is not an easy job, and I greatly appreciate that.

Mr. LEONARD. No, it is not.

Ms. ELFRETH. Can you speak just briefly, I only have a few seconds left, again, we both represent low-lying, flood-prone areas. I appreciate the purpose of this legislation, but I am very concerned about its consequences, both locally and federally.

What would you say to my concerns? How would you respond?

Mr. LEONARD. Well, I would like to address those through some of the comments that Dr. Young has made.

We are looking right now at a CBRA zone that within our town has 5,886 acres. We are asking for the removal of 590 of those 5,886 acres. We are looking at approximately 700 structures to be removed. North Topsail has a very aggressive and very proactive unified development ordinance, we are very careful with where we allow development, and we are very careful where we do not allow development. And we have had over the years people try to develop in areas, and they get shut down. They get shut down. We just don't allow it.

We are right now, in terms of buildable lots, we are between 90 and 95 percent built out. We are a donor community, the National Flood Insurance Program. We pay way more in premiums than we receive in claims, to the point where probably over 300 percent more in terms of premiums than we are reimbursed in claims. Over the period of 1987 to 2015, we received \$524,000 in claim money, and we paid premiums totaling over \$1.7 million.

We just want to be treated like the two other towns on Topsail Island.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. And the Chair now recognizes Mr. Webster for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. WEBSTER. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for holding this hearing.

Ms. Nungaray, thank you for coming to testify. I am a father and a grandfather, and my heart goes out to you, your family, all you are going through. I can't imagine the grief. And I just thought about how, there is nothing we can do to bring Jocelyn back, but at least we can do what we are doing, and that is the minimum, I guess, in naming the wildlife refuge after her.

Anyway, my question is, though, since President Trump made that announcement at the State of the Union, or whatever he called it, have you experienced any kind of pushback or negativity about from various groups about the action that has taken place?

Ms. NUNGARAY. A little bit I have, yes. With me being a very public advocate for better border security and better border immigration laws and just more security as citizens, I have definitely gotten a lot of pushback from people who are citizens, people who are not citizens.

When it comes to the refuge, I have gotten a lot of admiration and praise by people who, like you said, know that we cannot bring her back, but we can at least have her spirit and be known somewhere where she will always be free and enjoyed and happy.

Mr. WEBSTER. All right. So have you heard of any groups that have actually expressed an interest in just reversing it and not naming it after her?

Ms. NUNGARAY. To my knowledge, no. Nobody has reached out to me or my family or any officials that are familiar with me to change it back. But I hope that everyone will be in agreeance to keep this as her name, because it doesn't change the integrity of the importance of this place, it just, I feel, brings deeper meaning because she had so much love for the wildlife, animals, and outside.

Mr. WEBSTER. So there has been pushback for the renaming of the Gulf and so forth by Federal employees, on tours or other things have expressed, have kind of rejected it by expressing some sort of different name or whatever. Do you know of anybody that has done that, someone that has maybe given a tour of the place or talked about the place, some sort of Federal employee that would say something differently than your daughter's name?

Ms. NUNGARAY. Not to my knowledge, no, they have not.

Mr. WEBSTER. Thank you very much. Thanks for coming. Good to see you.

Ms. NUNGARAY. Thank you so much.

Mr. WEBSTER. I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Ms. Randall for 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. RANDALL. Thank you so much, Madam Chair and members of the Subcommittee, for allowing me to join in today's important hearing.

I am proud to be leading the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Act with Representative Larsen and Senator Murray. And the Northwest Straits Commission has been a lifeline for our communities, providing critical resources like the marine resources committees in Jefferson and Clallam Counties, and working alongside Tribes in the State.

The Northwest Straits Commission is a stellar example of the community-led environmental stewardship. Some examples of the Commission's work include research in managing kelp, management of derelict vessels, and prevention to protect the surrounding marine environment from debris and pollutants.

Additionally, the Commission has worked to manage the critical marine animals' diets in the Puget Sound and our kelp forests, including the southern resident orcas. Another program established in Port Townsend by the Jefferson Marine Resources Committee is being expanded to protect eelgrass and encourage boaters to be mindful of their damaging effects of dropping anchors in eelgrass meadows.

This bill represents a strength of community partnership in Washington's 6th district, and the importance of coming together to protect and preserve the Puget Sound's natural beauty for generations to come. The educational resources on marine issues provided by the Northwest Straits Commission through the Marine Resource Committees are invaluable to our neighbors in the 6th district. It is our communities that know these areas better than anyone and who should be in the driver's seat, shaping the future of the preservation and restoration of our natural wonders. It is now more important than ever to protect invaluable marine habitat

that make Washington's 6th district so unique and special. From abalone beds and oysters to the rugged coastlines that stretch for hundreds of miles, our natural resources must be safeguarded to protect for the future.

And I don't have any questions for this panel, but I do urge my colleagues on this Committee to support this legislation and protect the future of our environmental resources.

And I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you for joining us today and providing that important information.

The Chair now recognizes Ms. Hoyle.

No? All right, then I am not going to recognize Ms. Hoyle today.

[Laughter.]

Ms. HAGEMAN. I will recognize Mr. Ezell for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you all for being here today.

And Ms. Nungaray, I am so sorry for your loss, having spent my entire life as a law enforcement officer and dealing with so many problems that could have been prevented had an ounce of prevention been provided. So just God bless you, and I am so sorry.

Dr. Howden, you said it perfectly in your testimony the Integrated Ocean Observing System, IOOS, is not just about science and data. It is about safety, sovereignty, and smart governance. IOOS is a single system that supports many needs, making it a cost-effective investment for the American taxpayer. The reauthorization of IOOS saves lives and billions of dollars in our coastal regions. In fact, the value of IOOS's regional observing system is between \$192 million and \$233 million per year, creating an economic value approximately 5 times greater than the current annual investment in the system. The data and information products and services at IOOS support decision-making and innovation for more than \$432 billion GDP ocean-based economy.

As I previously mentioned, this program touches every region of the country. This is why it is so widely supported by among Republicans and Democrats. Madam Chairwoman, I would like to enter into the record a letter with almost 100 signatures from Members of Congress in support of this program that President Trump previously reauthorized and signed into law.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Without objection, so ordered.

[The letter submitted for the record by Mr. Ezell follows:]

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 14, 2025

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related
Agencies
H-130 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Grace Meng
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related
Agencies
H-130 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Meng:

We write to thank you for your continued support of the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). We ask the committee to provide the authorized level of \$56 million for IOOS Regional Observations under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Ocean Service in the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations legislation.

IOOS is the nation's leading resource for community-driven coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes information. This vital public-private program supports a vast network of buoys, gliders, high-frequency radars, and other sensors that monitor U.S. waters and provides data, tools, and forecasts to safeguard the entire U.S. coastline. IOOS sustains critical, publicly accessible data and data products that enable coastal and Great Lakes communities to monitor, understand, predict, and plan for hazards that impact coastal infrastructure and people, including storms, flooding, rip currents, and harmful algal blooms. This efficient, reliable, and cost-effective system supports emergency preparedness, underpins a thriving blue economy, and bridges the gap between scientific research, federally certified data, and informed coastal management.

Sustained, reliable, and accessible data are the foundation for understanding and making decisions about our coasts, oceans, and Great Lakes. Our priority is to secure robust funding for the national network of eleven Regional Associations (RAs) that generate and deliver information tailored to the needs of local shippers, fishermen, emergency and resource managers, public health officials, aquaculture farmers, coastal communities, and recreators. The RAs deploy, operate, maintain, or otherwise support more than 1,000 monitoring assets and integrate and serve data from federal and non-federal sources through federally certified regional data centers.

The IOOS program was reauthorized unanimously by Congress in 2020 in a bill that was signed into law by President Trump. This appropriations request is at the program's authorized funding level as outlined in that law. Appropriated funds will sustain operation of the regional coastal observing systems to ensure continuity of data services to communities, industries, and decision-makers. Strong core funding allows IOOS to maximize and strategically grow its impact through leveraged partnerships that provide new predictive capacity for coastal and Great Lakes stakeholders. Fully authorized funding will also advance high-priority initiatives and innovation, including through competitive grants for improvements in ecosystem monitoring, tools related to planning and preparedness for inundation, and detection and forecasting of harmful algal blooms. For example, several IOOS-supported projects are working toward operationalizing a National Harmful Algal Bloom Observing Network – an action that Congress has supported since fiscal year 2021.

The full document is available for viewing at:

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II13/20250520/118221/HHRG-119-II13-20250520-SD008.pdf>

Mr. EZELL. The passage of my bill, H.R. 2294, will better the country as a whole, save taxpayer dollars, provide hurricane data, and much more. I thank Representatives Weber, Radewagen, Bonamici, and Dingell for introducing this legislation with me.

Dr. Howden, I would like to ask you a few questions. The IOOS program relies on regional associations like the Gulf of America Coastal Ocean Observing System to customize services for local needs. Can you give an example of how that regional approach has improved public safety, maritime operations, or ecosystem management in the Gulf, especially as we prepare for hurricane season?

Dr. HOWDEN. Yes, thank you for that question. There are a number of ways that the regional associations help to enhance the maritime industry.

The surface currents, for example, are important for ships going in and out of ports, especially in some of the ports like Houston and Mobile and Tampa Bay, where the pilots will frequently look at the surface current data before bringing ships in and out. The hurricane glider project, where we are measuring heat content and ocean barrier layers in the areas where hurricanes transmit over the ocean before striking the coast, those observations, through the IOOS data management system, get to the Weather Service and they get to the hurricane forecast models. And so they improve the forecasts for the hurricanes, and that results in better evacuation decisions.

Evacuation decisions are very costly, whether you make the right call or the wrong call.

Mr. EZELL. Right, right.

Dr. HOWDEN. And so that is an important part of the system.

And then there are things like monitoring hypoxia, which affects shrimpers. There is the harmful algal blooms which have a impact on shellfish safety. And so the systems for monitoring those and providing the data for fisheries management is very important. The temperature, salinity, and dissolved oxygen measurements are really important for NOAA's fish habitat assessments and managing those resources.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you very much. During your time at the University of Southern Mississippi you operate high frequency radar systems and ocean buoys in the Gulf of America that provide real-time data on current waves, winds, and those kinds of things. And you did describe to us how—the bar pilots use all that stuff very much, which is so important. If folks don't know what a bar pilot does, they are very important to our system.

But can you tell me just a little bit how it helps the navigation just right in and out, like, trying to get into the channel or trying to get into the harbor?

Dr. HOWDEN. Yes. So one of the things that IOOS data is used for is precision navigation. What that means is these ships are trying to come into port with minimal under-keel clearances. So NOAA estimates that every inch of draft is worth about \$70,000 for a bulk agricultural product. For consumer electronics it is worth about \$5 to \$10 million per inch, and then for heavy agricultural machinery it is worth \$22 million per inch. So one ship coming in with three extra inches of draft with heavy agricultural equipment

would make more revenue than any annual appropriation for IOOS has ever been.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you. How important is it that we pass H.R. 2294 and reauthorize this program again like we did under President Trump?

Dr. HOWDEN. It is very important. If the funding for IOOS is lost, we will lose the high frequency radar network. IOOS has the only national network of high frequency radars, so we will lose that search and rescue capability enhancement and all the other things that surface current support. We will lose the hurricane glider program which right now is actually running on disaster relief, so it hasn't been funded through the core funding of IOOS. And we would lose all these partnerships that have been developed, these relationships that have been developed over the years with all these stakeholders in our coastal and inland communities.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I yield back.

Thank you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, and I want to thank each of the witnesses for being here today. You provided some very valuable, insightful testimony, and I know that I learned some things and it was a joy to have you.

I also want to thank the members for their questioning and their engagement today.

The members of the Committee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we will ask you to respond to those in writing. Under Committee rule 3, members of the Committee must submit such questions to the Subcommittee clerk by 5 p.m. Eastern on Friday, May 23. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for those responses.

And if there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:41 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Statement for the Record
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
H.R. 2860 and H.R. 2294

Introduction

The Department and NOAA acknowledge and appreciate the ongoing work with this Subcommittee on ocean and coastal conservation efforts and ocean observation infrastructure.

H.R. 2860—Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Reauthorization Act of 2025

H.R. 2860 seeks to reauthorize the Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative Act to enhance the conservation of marine resources in the Northwest Straits region in Washington state, including parts of Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The bill would reauthorize the Northwest Straits Commission, a regional collaborative body, to provide resources and technical support to further conservation efforts. The Northwest Straits Commission works to conserve the marine waters, habitats, and species of the Northwest Straits region with the goal of achieving ecosystem health and sustainable resource use.

NOAA has worked with the Northwest Straits Commission on a wide range of issues. For example, the Northwest Straits Commission has led collaborations among forage fish experts in the U.S. and Canada. Forage fish are a critical food source for commercially important salmon, as well as killer whales. Forage fish are also used as bait for commercial and sport fisheries. The Northwest Straits Commission provides funding and technical support for monitoring, research, policy, and local planning efforts; and to improve conditions for forage fish populations (e.g., addressing modified shoreline armoring and stormwater runoff into local embayments).

Additionally, NOAA collaborated with the Northwest Straits Commission on the Kelp Plan, which provides a research and management framework for coordinated action to improve kelp beds that are a necessary habitat for commercially important salmon, rockfish, halibut, and Dungeness crab.

H.R. 2294—To reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of 2009

H.R. 2294 would reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System (ICOOS) Act. The original ICOOS Act authorized NOAA to collect sustained ocean observations, such as ocean current, sea state, and temperature profile, and to make the resulting data publicly available. This data is used by other Federal agencies, state and local governments, and industry to benefit maritime safety and awareness and weather forecasting.

Conclusion

We appreciate the Subcommittee's support for NOAA's mission and look forward to working with you on these bills and future legislation.

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Ezell

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. MIKE EZELL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) main goal is to enrich life through science. NOAA has a wide overview of issues including weather forecasts, severe storm warnings, fisheries management, coastal restoration, and supporting marine commerce.

One way NOAA achieves their goal is through their Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS—eye yoos). IOOS was established by Congress in 2009. The program was supported in a strong bipartisan way and reauthorized in 2020 under President Trump's leadership,

IOOS is made up of 11 regional associations and works closely with 17 federal agencies.

The IOOS program operates all throughout the U.S. coastal regions, from Alaska to the Caribbean, which means there isn't a single part of the country this program doesn't affect.

IOOS purpose is a vital public-private program that supports a vast network of buoys, gliders, high-frequency radars, and other sensors that monitor U.S. waters and provides data, tools, and forecasts to safeguard the entire U.S. coastline.

IOOS sustains critical, publicly accessible data and data products that enable coastal and Great Lakes communities to monitor, understand, predict, and plan for hazards that impact coastal infrastructure and people, including storms, flooding, hurricanes, rip currents, and harmful algal blooms.

My bill, H.R. 2294, reauthorizes the IOOS program to safeguard the United States coasts for the betterment of community, commerce, and safety.

Now, I am proud to introduce a friend from the Gulf Coast, a professor at USM, Stephan Howden. Through the IOOS program, Dr. Howden has been able to provide accurate research through his glider program which provides more accurate warnings, saving billions of dollars, and potentially lives for the Gulf Coast.

Dr. Howden, thank you for taking the time to testify on this very important matter before the Subcommittee.

Madam chair, I yield back.

Woods Hole Group

May 19, 2025

Re: U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS)

Dear Dr. Brenner,

I am writing to express my strong support for the U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS), the regional associations it sustains across the country, and GCOOS specifically. We at Woods Hole Group place high value on our collaboration with GCOOS, including contracts with your organization to provide services essential for the Oil & Gas operations in the Gulf of America. Our work together on Quality Assurance and Quality Control of ocean current measurements collected by drilling units in the Gulf, which is one of the most comprehensive oceanographic campaigns ever conceived, helps ensure safe design and operation of offshore production infrastructure. These data also allow industries such as shipping and fishing to operate efficiently, using such information to make safe decisions while saving time and money in benefit of the economy of the Gulf states: Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

Woods Hole Group is a commercial entity that also appreciates the business we do with GCOOS, which has created and helps sustain jobs at our company for qualified marine professionals. The work we do also employs the services of marine service providers, work vessels, divers, and related services and products in the region. These programs play a vital role in protecting public safety, promoting economic stability, and advancing the long-term stewardship of our ocean and coastal resources.

The proposed elimination of funding for IOOS Regional Observations in the Fiscal Year 2026 President's Budget for NOAA is deeply concerning. GCOOS and the other 10 Regional Associations that comprise IOOS deliver critical data, tools, and services that are not easily replaced and are essential to a wide array of public and private sector operations.

NOAA and IOOS data products are essential, foundational inputs in the analyses, models, and solutions developed by Woods Hole Group. We serve a diverse client base of federal agencies, state and local governments, Oil & Gas stakeholders, ports and maritime businesses, and private coastal developers and landowners. Our work leverages tide gauge, wind, and wave buoy data to quantify flooding, sea state conditions, currents, sediment transport, and coastal erosion to produce representative site characterizations. This work informs coastal management plans, habitat restoration designs, flood mitigation strategies, and design criteria for critical infrastructure (thus reducing its operational risk).

IOOS exemplifies the power of strategic public investment. It strengthens collaboration among federal agencies, academic institutions, industry leaders, and local governments, while delivering measurable economic and societal benefits. Its value extends well beyond data collection. It is an indispensable regional asset that supports maritime commerce, port security, emergency preparedness, fisheries management, and environmental monitoring.

We need more of these data, not less. As a company that relies on IOOS to support jobs and economic development while protecting vulnerable communities and ecosystems, we strongly oppose any effort to defund IOOS Regional Observations. We respectfully urge decision-makers to ensure that regional associations remain a fully supported and sustained component of NOAA's mission.

Please continue your outstanding work. You have our full support.

Sincerely,

ROBERT P. HAMILTON, JR.,
President

Tampa Bay Pilots Association

April 17, 2025

Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of the members of the Tampa Bay Pilot Association I would like to express our concern about the potential loss of multiple critical NOAA services due to budgetary and personnel cutbacks currently taking place at the Federal level. The specific NOAA services that we rely on routinely are as follows:

PORTS Tampa Bay Wave Buoy—This buoy is funded by ACOE's Coastal Data Information Program (CDIP) and it is critical for safe navigation during heavy weather events and for efficient vessel scheduling before and after those weather events.

NOAA Integrated Ocean Observing System buoys—Four buoys funded by the Integrated Ocean Observing System regional association (SECOORA) on West Florida Shelf are critical for safe navigation and monitoring weather events. These buoys provide critical sea state information to vessels transiting the Gulf.

NOAA National Weather Service—Navigating the narrow 70+ mile channels of Tampa Bay in ever changing weather conditions requires real-time, accurate weather forecasts which we currently receive from the Ruskin NWS. Loss or limitations to this critical service would increase the risk of weather-related vessel casualties and/or require additional safe handling guidelines that would impede commercial vessel transits.

NOAA PORTS Tampa Bay—Since its inception the PORTS system has significantly decreased vessel groundings and enabled Pilots to efficiently move vessels utilizing real-time tide, wind, current, wave and visibility data. The loss of PORTS would decrease vessel movement efficiencies and increase the risk of vessel groundings.

NOAA Coastal Surveying and Mapping—Having accurate hydrographic survey information of areas within Tampa Bay and the coastal vicinity is critical knowledge during vessel casualty events requiring anchorage locations and any time a vessel must operate outside of an ACOE navigable channel. Loss of this information would limit options for safe operation outside of those channels.

Pre hurricane planning—Accurate storm forecasting and modelling cannot be understated as related to port operations. The ability to plan and prepare saves lives (mariners included), protects infrastructure and results in a quicker post storm recovery. A loss of this service would be detrimental in many areas of maritime operations.

Post hurricane response—Following the 2024 storms Helene and Milton the timely surveying response and support from NOAA was paramount in our ability to safely commence vessel movements within 36 hours of the passing of both storms. The survey data provided was detailed and accurate and provided the confidence needed to quickly return to normal commercial operations.

In summary we are hopeful that the NOAA IOOS, NOAA NWS, and ACOE services that we rely on to safely navigate the channels of Tampa Bay will remain intact and receive the necessary funding to continue to operate at the high standards we are currently accustomed to.

Sincerely,

TERRY W. FLUKE,
Executive Director

Center for the Blue Economy

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3-2023

The U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS): A Prototype User Valuation

Charles S. Colgan

Center for the Blue Economy, Middlebury Institute of International Studies, ccolgan@middlebury.edu

Castelletto Anthony

Center for the Blue Economy at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

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<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II13/20250520/118221/HHRG-119-II13-20250520-SD005.pdf>

May 5, 2025

Re: Support for IOOS & GCOOS RA Budget



Dear Honorable Members of Congress,

The fishing and seafood industry in the Gulf of America is concerned that the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) Regional Observations may be defunded as proposed in the Fiscal Year 2026 OMB passback to NOAA. IOOS and its regional observing systems are a proven federal-private partnership that delivers federally certified, real-time data essential for the safety and success of U.S. near shore and maritime industries.

IOOS plays a vital role in securing U.S. food dominance. The commercial fishing sector has worked with IOOS for years to align data and tools with our offshore operational needs, which has supported safety and efficiency for the fishing and seafood industry. In the Gulf of America, GCOOS (one of the IOOS regional systems) manages ocean temperature, salinity, current and other data from more than 1,600 sensors aimed at enhancing the safe operation of offshore projects. The fishing industry also relies on GCOOS's data portal for critical oceanographic and hydrographic information on the Gulf of America shelf, Loop Current, eddies, and some of the most significant risks to offshore personnel and infrastructure. Further, IOOS is the only federally sponsored network that works with NOAA and the Navy to deploy seasonal underwater autonomous vehicles that have improved hurricane intensity forecasts by up to 50%, helping better prepare and protect fishing personnel and infrastructure in the Gulf from hurricane threats. Finally, IOOS's High Frequency Radar Network for mapping surface current data over the continental shelf directly supports U.S. Coast Guard search and rescue missions and multi-agency mitigation of oil spills.

IOOS is a vital bipartisan program that is fully aligned with one of the Administration's priorities for NOAA to focus on collecting essential coastal ocean and weather observations to support navigation and forecasting. The IOOS Act was last signed into law in 2020 by President Trump. Representative Mike Ezell, representing coastal Mississippi, introduced a reauthorization bill (H.R. 2294) in the House on March 24 that currently has 17 bipartisan sponsors. IOOS received strong support from House Republicans in the last appropriations cycle (the House CJS bill funded IOOS at its authorized level of \$56M). It seems like an oversight that IOOS may be caught up in bigger cuts to NOAA and grant programs.

The IOOS network could not operate without continued federal investment, and the fishing and seafood industry stands firmly behind IOOS. We urge you to ensure that FY25 funding for IOOS Regional Observations is executed at the FY24 level (\$42.5M) and to oppose any defunding of IOOS as proposed in the FY26 OMB document.

Respectfully Yours,

Fredrik J. Stengard
Vice President, Research-Quality Assurance-Food Safety

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45 YEARS
of Seafood Excellence

Sofar Ocean Technologies

May 6, 2025

Re: Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) Regional Associations

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in response to the news reported on April 11th about the Fiscal Year 2026 President's Budget for NOAA, specifically for the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) Regional Associations. This scenario would be mutually devastating for NOAA and for Sofar Ocean, a startup providing critical ocean intelligence and ocean sensors manufactured in the USA. Public-private partnerships, such as those cultivated by IOOS Regional Associations, are focused on growing the blue economy and enhancing public safety. Further, I have heard that NOAA is being instructed to implement these funding cuts and any associated reorganization this year, immediately harming maritime and coastal safety.

As a long-time ocean observations partner of the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS), I implore you to ensure that IOOS and its regional associations are retained as a program in NOAA with a specific budget line that is adequately funded to meet the demands for information that support safe and efficient maritime commerce, weather and hurricane forecasting, flooding, harmful algal bloom monitoring, and other safety-related concerns.

Our work with IOOS supports everything from recreation, fishing, and tourism to promoting coastal safety through environmental monitoring. The Blue Economy depends on the ability to gather and use high quality ocean data. IOOS is a program with strong bipartisan support, as evidenced by the recent introduction of its reauthorization bill in the House. It is essential that you support only budget requests or administration actions that preserve critical programs for NOAA and for IOOS Regional Associations. These in turn will protect public safety, economic opportunities, and American jobs in the Blue Economy.

Sincerely,

TOSCA LICHTENHELD,
Head of Federal

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Gray

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. ADAM GRAY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

I want to take this opportunity of having the Acting Deputy Director of Operations of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services here today to bring an important issue in my district to light. As you all know, water is vital to the Central Valley. Our agriculture, energy, ecosystems, and communities are all dependent on reliable access to water. That's why the Central Valley Project Voluntary Agreements, which represent a collaborative and science-based alternative to rigid regulation, are so important. I represent one of the key players in this conversation, the Merced Irrigation District. Since the 1960s, MID has owned and operated the New Exchequer Hydroelectric Project, which includes Lakes McClure and McSwain. This project delivers enormous value—providing water storage and supply for Merced County, the 5th largest agricultural county in the U.S., offers critical flood control for hundreds of downstream communities, generates clean, renewable hydropower and stabilizes the electric grid, and supports river flows during droughts, recreational opportunities, and fishery flows, including the only salmon hatchery on the San Joaquin River system. To continue operating, MID must renew its federal license through FERC. That process also requires a Clean Water Act Section 401 certification from the California State Water Board. In 2015, FERC released a Final Environmental Impact Statement, a fair and balanced environmental review that considered MID's needs while strengthening environmental protections. But while MID worked through the federal relicensing process, the State Water Board went in a different direction and adopted Phase 1 of its Bay-Delta Plan, which proposes taking a percentage of Merced River flows and sending them to the ocean—based on the possibility of adding just 450 natural salmon per year. That water would travel more than 100 miles downstream, past farms, cities, and infrastructure, to reach the Delta. Earlier this year, the State Water Board released a draft 401 certification that would effectively bypass FERC's findings, placing the burden of statewide water decisions on a single regional agency. The consequences would be devastating to my district. This is not balanced water management and puts the livelihoods of thousands, the health of our watershed, and our energy resilience at risk. The Voluntary Agreements offer a better path. Collaborations between local agencies, state and federal governments, and environmental organizations deliver real results on habitat, flow, and accountability. I will work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, as well as President Trump and Governor Newsom, to prevent overreach. It is crucial for the Central Valley that we find solutions reflect the complex realities on the ground.

Additionally, in the final days of the Biden Administration the EPA settled a lawsuit with an environmental litigant regarding Phase 1 of Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan in California. This triggered ESA consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, along with the National Marine Fisheries Service. I look forward to hearing from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the current status of this. Thank you.

