

**Testimony of Dave Miko,
Acting Deputy Director for Operations,
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Department of the Interior**

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

**Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1676, Making SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025; H.R. 3538,
Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025; H.R. 3858, Sport Fish Restoration,
Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025**

June 24, 2025

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 for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony on the following legislation: H.R. 1676, Making SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025; H.R. 3538, Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025; and H.R. 3858, Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025.

H.R. 1676, Making SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025

H.R. 1676, the Making SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025 would amend the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, or Pittman-Robertson Act, to require the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to review and approve State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) within 180 days of submission, or the plans are deemed approved.

In 2000, Congress authorized both a Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program under the Pittman-Robertson Act and a separate State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program, providing \$50 million to both programs, and requiring states to submit planning documents to receive funding from either program. As the Service implemented these programs, it determined that the planning documents required by the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program could serve as the State Wildlife Action Plans required by the SWG program. Congress has continued to fund the SWG program since 2000, but has not funded the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program. SWAP requirements under SWG are consistent with the statutory requirements for the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program under the Pittman-Robertson Act, which this bill seeks to amend. Specific requirements for the SWG program are only detailed in annual appropriations legislation.

The State Wildlife Grant program provides funding to states and territories to support state-led conservation. To receive funding, states must develop SWAPs, which are plans for wildlife conservation, wildlife-associated recreation, and wildlife conservation education and provide a strategic framework for prioritizing conservation projects and identifying key species information needs, informing local development and land-use planning. SWAPs must meet specific statutory requirements including use of the best available science to inform conservation

plans and methods and identification of priority research and habitat conservation proposals to conserve declining species. SWAPs must be reviewed and approved by the Service, and if necessary, revised every ten years.

Once state agencies develop a SWAP, they submit it to a Regional Review Team composed of Service staff and neighboring state fish and wildlife agency staff for review. The Regional Review Team evaluates the SWAP and makes a recommendation to Service leadership on whether to approve it. The review process, including communication with the state agency to resolve questions, and final approval, typically takes approximately six months. During the last review cycle in 2015, most SWAPs were reviewed within this timeframe. However, some SWAP reviews required additional time to ensure statutory requirements were met. By October of 2025, 47 states are expected to submit updated SWAPs for review, presenting a significant anticipated workload for Regional Review Teams and the Service.

The Service supports the sponsor's efforts to increase government efficiency and predictability. The President's FY 2026 budget request includes \$1.1 billion for the Service and proposes to eliminate funding for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant programs, recognizing that Federal dollars should only be spent on critical Federal responsibilities. The Service recognizes that our work to conserve natural resources across broad landscapes benefits from partnerships with States, Tribes and private landowners and is working to empower locally led and funded conservation efforts. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to achieve these goals.

H.R. 3538, Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025

H.R. 3538 directs the Secretary to establish a voluntary, cooperative program, in partnership with a professional accrediting zoological association, to assist federal wildlife law enforcement agencies with the placement and care of confiscated animals. This program, termed the Wildlife Confiscations Network (Network), would establish protocols for animal care, maintain a database of qualified facilities, establish a committee to review membership requests, and serve as the single point of contact for law enforcement agencies needing to care for an animal.

President Trump recognized the serious threat of wildlife trafficking to conservation, national security, and economic prosperity by signing Executive Order (EO) 13773. EO 13773 directed federal law enforcement agencies to strengthen enforcement against transnational criminal organizations that threaten public safety and national security through the "illegal smuggling and trafficking of humans, drugs or other substances, wildlife, and weapons." Once a crime of opportunity carried out on a small-scale, today highly sophisticated criminal organizations, such as Mexican drug cartels and Chinese gangs, illegally traffic wildlife and launder the proceeds into their narcotics, weapons, and human trafficking operations across America's borders and around the globe.

As the lead federal agency for enforcing wildlife laws, the Service's Office of Law Enforcement is already working to implement EO 13773 and support President Trump's efforts to secure the nation's borders. The Service's investigative and enforcement activities are led by roughly 191 special agents and 129 wildlife inspectors stationed domestically and around the globe. In the

United States, the Service was responsible for inspecting 185,762 declared shipments, valued at over \$6.6 billion in legal commerce, at 18 ports of entry in 2024. In addition, Service special agents are stationed as attachés at 10 U.S. embassies and stations in countries that drive or enable the illegal wildlife trade. In FY 2024, the work of the Service's Office of Law Enforcement personnel contributed to 11,969 wildlife crime investigations, resulting in court-ordered restitution of \$2.3 million in fines, \$6.4 million in civil penalties, 80 years in prison, and 254 years of probation.

One challenge of our successful enforcement is the growing inventory of seized live wildlife that need to be placed in qualified animal care facilities. From 2019 through June 6, 2025, the Service had 1,189 cases involving the interdiction of 72,989 live animals of which 26,296 are species that are listed under Endangered Species Act (ESA) or the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This means approximately 31 live animals a day, including 11 ESA or CITES-listed species needed to be placed in potentially long-term care, something for which the Service does not have the capacity. We note that providing direct care for seized wildlife does not fall within the primary responsibilities of the Service but is inherently necessary in the enforcement of wildlife laws. While the Service has been able to secure appropriate care for confiscated specimens historically, we are reliant on public and private relationships to meet this need. To build on our existing relationships to address this volume, in 2023 the Service and a private membership organization formed a cooperative agreement to implement a pilot program in Southern California wherein their member facilities were a point of contact to place confiscated specimens. This agreement has been successful in placing over 4,600 animals, of which 980 are listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA, in facilities over the last two years. However, not all specimens were able to be placed in these member facilities, and a need exists to expand the network of facilities outside of a single private organization.

The Service supports the goals of H.R. 3538 to create an accessible network of qualified care facilities and assist the Service's efforts to provide suitable care for any animals seized. However, the Service is concerned that provisions of the bill would limit our ability to obtain care for animals, including those protected by laws other than the ESA or CITES. We defer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for its views on provisions of the bill that may affect their programs. Towards that end, we would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to provide technical assistance on the legislation to clarify and improve implementation to provide the best opportunity for suitable care for those animals seized by the Service.

H.R. 3858, Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025

The Service supports H.R. 3858, which would reauthorize the Sport Fish Restoration Fund for 5 years, and includes some minor technical adjustments.

The Sport Fish Restoration Act, also known as Dingell-Johnson Act, is a cornerstone of America's conservation heritage. Since Congress created the Sport Fish Restoration program in

1950, it has provided over \$12 billion for the conservation and restoration of sport fish species, as well as recreational and educational opportunities for the boating and fishing public.

The Sport Fish Restoration Fund provides dedicated, reliable funding to states. It is supported by an excise tax, paid by manufacturers, on sport fishing equipment, as well as import duties on fishing tackle and pleasure boats, and the portion of the gasoline tax attributable to small engines and motorboats. These taxes have helped create a strong federal-state-private partnership, where industry pay a tax to support state-led conservation and enhancement of the natural resources they enjoy. State fish and wildlife agencies, towns, boating and fishing equipment manufacturers, and individuals have been working together for 75 years to ensure America's sport fishing and recreational boating opportunities are some of the best in the world. The U.S. Coast Guard also receives Sport Fish Restoration funding for Boating Safety Programs.

The Sport Fish Restoration program continues to improve fishing opportunities by directly supporting robust sport fisheries, access to sport fishing opportunities, and recruiting and retaining fishing newcomers each year. The program supports fisheries by funding state-led management for over 200 species of sport fish and operation of over 320 hatcheries, stocking more than 1 billion fish annually. The Sport Fish Restoration program also supports the operation and maintenance of over 9,000 fishing and boating access areas annually, including fishing piers and boat ramps, providing the public access to blue-ribbon fisheries and one-of-a-kind recreational areas. Finally, the program supports aquatic education for 850,000 students annually, introducing the next generation to fishing.

The Sport Fish Restoration Fund also includes several programs to enhance recreational boating and protect clean water. The Boating Infrastructure Grant program has funded the construction of 32,000 linear feet of docks over the last five years, as well as other facilities to provide new support for large, non-trailerable, transient recreational boats. The Clean Vessel Act program has supported the construction, renovation, or maintenance of 748 pump out stations over the same time period, protecting water quality in recreational areas.

Outdoor recreation is a powerful driver in our economy, supporting local guides and outfitters, hotels and restaurants, and domestic manufacturers. The federal-state-private partnership supported by the Sport Fish Restoration program drives continuous investments back into the fisheries, recreational areas, and access sites that will continue to support jobs, businesses, and the enjoyment of future generations.

The Service supports H.R. 3858, which will continue this important and impactful work. Reauthorization of the Sport Fish Restoration Fund will support the long-term viability of the natural resources, access, and demand that drive a thriving outdoor recreation economy that supports local communities across the country.

Conclusion

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