

**Testimony**  
**Major William Holcomb**  
**Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries**  
**Committee on Natural Resources Committee**  
**United States House of Representatives**  
**July 22, 2025**

Good morning, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries, my name is William Holcomb, and I am a Major in the Division of Law Enforcement of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). FWC is the state agency that manages fish and wildlife for our residents and our visitors. Thank you for the invitation to provide the committee with our thoughts on H.R. 3831, the “Florida Safe Seas Act,” and H.R. 3706, the “Standards for Understanding Source and Habitat Identification Act,” or “SUSHI Act,” which U.S. Rep. Babin (R-TX) introduced.

Florida is the nation’s third most populous state with a population of 23.37 million residents and welcomed 143 million visitors, or 391,780 visitors each day, in 2024. This translated to roughly 42 percent of the entire population of the United States visited Florida last year. Florida is one of the premier fishing environments in the world and our diverse and abundant fisheries are important drivers for tourism and the economy. Florida has exceeded more than 1 million registered recreational boats, issued more than 2.5 million fishing licenses to residents and nonresidents, and issued almost 9,000 commercial fishing licenses. In addition, Florida is the only place in the United States where hunters can fulfill their grand slam by harvesting the Osceola Turkey. Our residents and visitors love the outdoors. With this level of interest in our natural resources, it is easy to see why Florida is the fishing and boating capital of the world and a destination for sportsmen from all over the world.

Florida is home to some of the world’s most diverse wildlife. FWC protects and manages more than 500 species of marine life, more than 200 species of freshwater fish, more than 575 species of wildlife, including manatees, and works to limit the expansion of pythons in our beloved Everglades and lionfish on our coral reefs. Our more than 2,000 employees are committed to conserving wildlife for now and the future.

As a peninsula state with fishery management responsibilities on both the Gulf of America and the South Atlantic, FWC is in a unique position to comment on both H.R. 3831 and H.R. 3706. FWC is pleased to support both bills.

I will begin my testimony today by discussing H.R. 3831. FWC wants to thank U.S. Rep. Webster (R-FL) and U.S. Rep. Soto (D-FL) for introducing this important legislation, and we thank them for their hard work on the House Natural Resources Committee to improve conservation in Florida.

FWC has a significant and award-winning law enforcement division whose motto is “To patrol, to protect, and to preserve.” Our law enforcement agents patrol our 12,133 square miles of water, 53,927 square miles of land, and 1,350 miles of coast to keep people safe and to ensure any harvests of fish and wildlife are legal and sustainable. With so many residents and visitors who want to explore our great outdoors, it is important for them to know the laws, be good stewards, and be safe. Keeping everyone safe is a priority for our agency. Any human interaction with wildlife of any kind has the potential for injury. Over the years, the state of Florida has, either by law or by regulations, taken steps to ensure our people are safe. For example, the state has passed laws prohibiting wildlife feeding. It is illegal for Floridians and visitors to feed alligators, crocodiles, bears, and raccoons.

To ensure safety to our waters, more than two decades ago, FWC promulgated a regulation that prohibits divers from feeding fish, sharks, and other marine species and also prohibits any person from operating a for-hire vessel for the purpose of carrying passengers to engage in fish feeding in Florida state waters. State waters are defined as shore to nine miles in the Gulf and shore to three miles in the South Atlantic. For FWC, promulgating this regulation was aimed at improving the safety of divers, surfers, and swimmers and also to eliminate the effects of conditioning sharks to associate people with food. FWC and the state of Florida support shark ecotourism. Sharks are apex predators that serve a critical role in keeping our ecosystems healthy, and we understand the attraction and curiosity to observe them in their natural environment. We want all our stakeholders to enjoy Florida's marine environment, but most of all, we want them to be safe while enjoying it. FWC supports the guidance from the Professional Association of Dive Instructors (PADI). According to PADI's sharks and rays tourism webpage, divers and instructors should follow PADI's top two best practices: First, do not touch the wildlife. And second, do not feed the wildlife. In addition, H.R. 3831 is supported by the Jupiter Dive Center in Jupiter, Florida.

In fact, just about all wildlife managers and conservationists discourage any feeding of wildlife for a variety of reasons since animals are adaptive creatures.

Visitors to our country's national parks are prohibited from feeding wildlife and are advised to maintain safe distances. Whether you are visiting Yellowstone National Park, the Grand Teton National Park, Joshua Tree National Park, Florida's own Everglades National Park, or the National Mall located a few feet from this hearing room, the National Park Service prohibits feeding wildlife within a national park.

Unfortunately, to the best of our knowledge, the only place where feeding wildlife is allowed is in federal waters off the United States. FWC supports H.R. 3831, the "Florida Safe Seas Act," because it closes a loophole and brings consistency between state and federal law by adding Florida to the list of states and territories where shark feeding is prohibited.

In addition, FWC supports H.R. 3706, the "Standards for Understanding Source and Habitat Identification Act," or "SUSHI Act," because we believe it too will increase public safety and it supports President Trump's Executive Order to restore America's dominance in the fishing industry.

In the Gulf of America, the commercial red snapper fishery is limited to a quota of 7,493,784 pounds of fish. Commercial caught red snapper is landed in Florida and our fellow four Gulf states, processed, and distributed throughout the country to grocery stores, fish markets, and restaurants. We have heard stories about foreign fleets that harvest red snapper and other fish species from our waters, return to their home country, and then import their harvests into the United States. In fact, a few months ago, four fishermen from Mexico pleaded guilty to illegally fishing for red snapper in the Gulf off South Padre Island, Texas. The men had 693 pounds of red snapper and four sharks valued at \$9,000, according to the United States Attorney's Office. These illegally caught red snapper would have been imported into the United States to the detriment of United States fishermen and others in the fishing industry.

H.R. 3706 would solve this problem by instructing the United States Department of Commerce to work with the United States Customs and Border Patrol and the United States Coast Guard to develop a standard methodology to chemically trace seafood and test it on red snapper and tuna. Additionally, we are pleased to see the needs of state law enforcement agencies will be considered when developing this technology. FWC believes this is an important tool in reducing the amount of IUU caught seafood that enters the United States.

In conclusion, FWC is ready to assist members of this committee and their staff to advance H.R. 3831 and H.R. 3706. Thank you, again, for this opportunity.