

**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries**  
**Legislative Hearing**  
**1324 Longworth House Office Building**  
**February 4, 2026**  
**10:00AM**

- **H.R. 3276 (Rep. Dingell)**, *“Local Communities & Bird Habitat Stewardship Act of 2025”*
- **H.R. 6021 (Rep. Begich)**, *“Archie Cavanaugh Migratory Bird Treaty Amendment Act”*
- **H.R. 6568 (Rep. Downing)**, *“Lower Yellowstone River Native Fish Conservation Act”*
- **H.R. 7159 (Rep. Gosar)**, *“Protecting Local Zoos Act of 2026”*

**Statement for the Record from Rep Soto**

The Protecting Local Zoos Act of 2026 delivers on key corrections to the Big Cat Public Safety Act, all of which are greatly supported by our local zoos in Central Florida.

The Feline Conservation Foundation, which is headed by Floridian President & CEO Brian Braitsch, believes the Protecting Local Zoos Act of 2026 “supports facilities that contribute to species survival, conservation breeding programs, veterinary advancement, and public engagement with wildlife.” The Feline Conservation Foundation further supports H.R. 7159 because it “creates much-needed clarity, which ensures that well-regulated and responsible institutions can continue to operate effectively while advancing conservation goals.”

The Central Florida Animal Reserve, based in Florida’s 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District and led by President & CEO K. Simba Wiltz, states that H.R. 7159 “correctly recognizes the full “circle of care” required to maintain high-welfare, high-safety captive wildlife programs—beyond only paid employees or contractors.” The Central Florida Animal Reserve also believes that the Protecting Local Zoos Act of 2026 “protects and clarifies veterinary and allied animal-health access to animals without creating unnecessary barriers to care.”

As such, I am proud to cosponsor H.R. 7159, the Protecting Local Zoos Act of 2026, which addresses the real needs of our zoos and conservationists without weakening core prohibitions in the Big Cat Public Safety Act.