

March 17, 2025

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Chair
House Natural Resources Subcommittee on
Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Val Hoyle
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Subcommittee on
Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle:

Thank you for holding an oversight hearing on the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), and for inviting a cattle farmer, Mississippi Farm Bureau President Mike McCormick, to testify. AFBF has over five million member families in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. We are farm and ranch families working together to build a sustainable future of safe and abundant food, fiber and renewable fuel for our nation and the world.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act implements four international conservation treaties for the protection of migratory birds. As landowners, farmers and ranchers play an important role in conservation. Voluntary conservation practices, in particular, are a cornerstone of modern agricultural operations, playing a crucial role in balancing productive farming with environmental stewardship. These practices allow farmers and ranchers to proactively manage their land to enhance wildlife habitat, protect soil health, conserve water, and reduce pollution — all while maintaining or improving crop and livestock yields.

At the same time, farmers and ranchers experience economic impacts and distress from the presence and actions of some bird species protected under the MBTA. Farm Bureau members have identified resident Canada geese, black vultures, caracara, sandhill cranes, crows, ravens, double-crested cormorants, and barn swallows as birds of particular concern. Each one of these affects agriculture in a different way, and some of these impacts are significant.

As President McCormick noted in his testimony, “I have seen a black vulture attack on my farm with my own eyes. And personally, it’s truly one of the most horrific things I’ve ever witnessed ... I can tell you how demoralized you feel when this happens on your farm. You spend vast amounts of time and investments in making sure the mother and unborn calf are properly cared for and protected from diseases or adverse weather events; to then see this horrific event happen at the hands of an aggressive predator and federally protected bird.” This story is repeated over and over by farmers who deal with the presence of black vultures, and it’s a situation I face on my own farm in Georgia. We have to regularly scatter the large groups of birds congregating in pastures and during calving we stay very close to our momma cows to protect them and their calves.

Farm Bureau appreciates being part of the Fish and Wildlife Service's black vulture depredation permit program, but the program is not as responsive to farmers' needs as the proposal in H.R. 2462, the Black Vulture Relief Act. This legislation would allow farmers and their employees to take black vultures if they have a reasonable belief the vultures will cause death, injury, or destruction to livestock. We commend the sponsors, Representatives Rose and Soto, and all the members of this committee who voted for it during committee consideration. We encourage the full House of Representatives to take up this bill expeditiously.

Double-crested cormorants are a significant nuisance for aquaculture, causing substantial losses for fish farmers. Consuming a pound of fish per day, flocks of hundreds or thousands of cormorants converge on aquaculture operations and require significant hazing. One study of cormorant impacts in the Delta region of Mississippi found the cost to scare birds can be as high as \$285 per acre. Driving around fish tanks or using noise-making devices are two hazing methods, but they must be continuously used and fish losses are unavoidable. Additionally, the researchers found that "the combined total of negative direct economic effects of the annualized costs of scaring birds and the value of fish lost to cormorants averaged \$64.7 million."¹

Farm Bureau appreciates Subcommittee Vice Chairman Ezell's leadership in introducing H.R. 2293, the Cormorant Relief Act of 2025, which would direct FWS to reissue the depredation order for double-crested cormorants at aquaculture facilities. We were pleased to see the House of Representatives unanimously pass the bill and urge the Senate to take up the legislation.

Thank you again to this subcommittee for providing oversight of the MBTA. American Farm Bureau Federation and state Farm Bureaus across the country stand ready to support your efforts to ease the impacts of predatory birds on farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zippy Duvall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Zippy Duvall
President

¹ Cormorant Predation of Commercial Catfish Aquaculture in the Mississippi Delta, Christie, et al, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Virginia State University. <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/AAEC/AAEC-231/AAEC-231.html>