



AMERICAN SPORTFISHING ASSOCIATION

July 21, 2026

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and
Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Val Hoyle
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and
Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle:

On behalf of the American Sportfishing Association, thank you for holding today's legislative hearing. ASA writes to express our strong support for three bills before the Subcommittee: H.R. 7332, the Whale CHARTS Act of 2026; H.R. 8876, the Aquatic Invasive Species Control and Prevention Act of 2026; and H.R. 9621, the Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act of 2026.

ASA is the nation's trade association representing the recreational fishing industry. Our members include fishing tackle manufacturers, retailers, wholesalers, independent sales representatives, fisheries conservation organizations, state fish and wildlife agencies and other organizations committed to healthy fisheries and public fishing access. America's 57 million recreational fishermen contribute \$230 billion in economic impact and support 1.1 million jobs. We are grateful to the Subcommittee for its continued advancement of legislation that enhances the social, economic and conservation benefits that recreational fishing provides to the nation.

H.R. 7332, the Whale CHARTS Act of 2026

ASA strongly supports H.R. 7332, introduced by Rep. Doris Matsui and a bipartisan group of cosponsors. The bill would strengthen federal efforts to map and monitor migratory whales and other large cetaceans, improve the collection and communication of whale-location information, and advance technologies that can reduce harmful interactions between whales and ocean users.

Of particular importance to the recreational fishing and boating community is the bill's authorization of a competitive grant program administered through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to develop, test and scale innovative whale-detection and vessel-strike-avoidance technologies.

Although collisions between smaller recreational vessels and large whales are extremely rare, they can have disastrous consequences for whales and vessel riders. Effective tools that provide mariners with timely, accurate and actionable information about whale locations offer the potential to reduce these risks while maintaining reasonable public access to the ocean.

This approach is already demonstrating promise. Using funding provided through the Inflation Reduction Act, NOAA Fisheries and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation established the Vessel Strike Avoidance Fund to support the development and adoption of innovative technologies that help mariners avoid collisions with large whales. Initial projects have supported technologies including acoustic detection, aerial monitoring, artificial

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intelligence, improved data integration and systems for communicating whale-location information to mariners.

H.R. 7332 would provide durable congressional authorization for this work and help move promising technologies from research and development to real-world deployment. ASA believes technology, improved data and direct communication with mariners must play a central role in protecting whales. These tools can produce meaningful conservation benefits without unnecessarily restricting recreational boating, fishing and other ocean uses.

ASA thanks Rep. Matsui and the bill's bipartisan cosponsors – including Subcommittee members Kiggans, Brownley, Huffman and Elfreth – for advancing a practical, science-based approach to whale conservation and maritime safety.

H.R. 8876, the Aquatic Invasive Species Control and Prevention Act of 2026

ASA strongly supports H.R. 8876, introduced by Reps. Tim Walberg and Sarah Elfreth. Aquatic invasive species are among the greatest threats facing America's fisheries, aquatic ecosystems, recreational access and water-dependent economies.

Species such as invasive carp, zebra and quagga mussels, sea lamprey and many others degrade fish habitat, disrupt food webs, damage infrastructure and diminish recreational fishing opportunities. Once established, invasive species can be extraordinarily difficult and expensive to control. Federal policy must therefore place greater emphasis on prevention, early detection, rapid response and effective coordination among federal, state, tribal and regional partners.

ASA has been actively involved in the development of H.R. 8876 and appreciates the bill sponsors' willingness to work closely with the recreational fishing community and other stakeholders. The legislation reflects many of the needs identified through the Blue-Ribbon Aquatic Invasive Species Commission, an initiative established in 2022 and facilitated by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership with participation from ASA and leaders representing fisheries management, conservation, recreational boating and the outdoor recreation industry.

The Commission found that the nation's existing framework is outdated, fragmented, and inadequate to address the growing scale of the aquatic invasive species challenge. H.R. 8876 responds by modernizing the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act, improving interagency coordination, strengthening regional partnerships and enhancing the federal government's capacity to prevent, contain, control and eradicate aquatic invasive species.

ASA particularly supports the bill's emphasis on prevention and rapid response. Managers are most likely to successfully eradicate an invasive species when it is detected early and addressed before it becomes broadly established. Providing dedicated resources and coordinated mechanisms for rapid response can prevent comparatively small infestations from becoming permanent and enormously costly problems.

The bill would also strengthen coordination with state, tribal and regional managers, who are frequently the first to identify new threats and are responsible for much of the on-the-ground work needed to protect fisheries and waterways.

ASA thanks Reps. Walberg and Elfreth for their leadership in developing this comprehensive, bipartisan legislation, and thanks Subcommittee members Ezell, Dingell and Neguse for their support and cosponsorship. We urge the Subcommittee to advance H.R. 8876.

H.R. 9621, the Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act of 2026

ASA strongly supports H.R. 9621, introduced by Reps. Michael Baumgartner and Emily Randall. This bipartisan legislation would provide state and tribal fisheries managers with additional tools to address significant pinniped predation on salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River Basin, Puget Sound and coastal Washington.

Pacific Northwest salmon and steelhead support recreational fisheries, tribal treaty fisheries, commercial fisheries and communities throughout the region. Federal, state and tribal governments, anglers, conservation organizations and businesses have invested billions of dollars and decades of work in habitat restoration, hatchery investments, fish passage, hydropower mitigation and responsible harvest management. Those investments are undermined when sea lions and harbor seals concentrate at dams, river mouths, estuaries and other migration bottlenecks where vulnerable salmon and steelhead can experience substantial predation.

In December 2025, ASA Pacific Fisheries Policy Director Larry Phillips testified before this Subcommittee in support of responsibly expanding pinniped-management authority in the Pacific Northwest. ASA emphasized that predator management should be science-based, carefully targeted and used as one component of a comprehensive salmon-recovery strategy. H.R. 9621 is consistent with that approach.

Congress amended the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 2018 to give state and tribal managers greater authority to remove California and Steller sea lions preying on salmon and steelhead in portions of the Columbia River and its tributaries. Experience under that authority demonstrates that targeted management can produce substantial benefits without threatening healthy pinniped populations.

According to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, sea lion removals conducted at Bonneville Dam and Willamette Falls have saved tens of thousands of adult salmonids. At Willamette Falls, sea lions had consumed as much as 25 percent of the winter steelhead run, contributing to an estimated 89 percent risk of extinction. Following targeted removals, predation fell below 2 percent and the estimated extinction risk declined to 11 percent. By 2025, only two sea lions required removal, demonstrating that focused intervention at predation hotspots can be effective and need not result in continuing removals at high levels.

However, limitations in current law prevent managers from applying this successful approach throughout the areas where predation is occurring. For example, sea lions that prey on fish in the Cowlitz River may return to resting areas in the lower Columbia River that are outside the geographic boundaries of the existing authority, limiting managers' ability to remove those animals. H.R. 9621 would address this gap by allowing management throughout the lower Columbia River and providing managers greater flexibility to act at identified predation hotspots.

The legislation would also establish a new Marine Mammal Protection Act permitting authority for Puget Sound and the Washington coast. Existing law generally requires an animal to be individually identifiable before it may be removed under section 120. That requirement may be workable at a fixed location such as Bonneville Dam, where marked animals can be repeatedly observed, but it presents substantial logistical challenges in

broad marine and estuarine environments. H.R. 9621 would allow Washington State and treaty tribes to seek permits for limited, science-based removals where pinniped predation is impeding the recovery of listed salmon and other fish populations of concern.

ASA particularly supports the bill's recognition of treaty tribes as eligible entities and fisheries co-managers. Tribes have invested extensively in habitat restoration, scientific research, hatchery management and conservative fisheries management, yet those efforts cannot fully succeed if salmon experience unchecked mortality before reaching spawning grounds or tribal fisheries. The bill would strengthen the role of treaty tribes, encourage innovative exclusion technologies and help ensure that treaty-reserved fishing rights remain meaningful for future generations.

H.R. 9621 does not treat predator management as a substitute for habitat restoration, fish passage improvements, hatchery reform or responsible harvest management. Rather, it recognizes that successful salmon recovery requires managers to address every significant source of mortality. The bill provides an adaptive framework under which state and tribal professionals can intervene judiciously, monitor both predator and prey populations, and use lethal removal only where supported by science and necessary to protect vulnerable salmon and steelhead.

ASA appreciates that the legislation also encourages the development and use of innovative nonlethal exclusion technologies. Salmon recovery and marine mammal conservation are compatible goals, but achieving both requires practical management authority rather than a statutory framework that prevents action even where concentrated predation is demonstrably undermining endangered fish recovery.

ASA thanks Representatives Baumgartner and Randall for developing this bipartisan legislation and urges the Subcommittee to advance H.R. 9621.

Thank you for considering the recreational fishing industry's views. ASA appreciates the Subcommittee's continued attention to healthy fisheries, effective conservation and public access to our nation's waters. We respectfully request that this letter be included in the hearing record.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Leonard", is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Mike Leonard
Vice President of Government Affairs