

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

June 28, 2021

Mr. Stephen Guertin
Deputy Director for Policy
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
5275 Leesburg Pike, 2N035
Falls Church, VA 22041-380

Dear Mr. Guertin,

I am writing to thank you for appearing before the Committee on Natural Resources at our virtual legislative hearing H.R. 3764, the *Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act of 2021*, and related bills: H.R. 660, H.R. 1415, H.R. 1689, H.R. 2750, H.R. 3160, H.R. 3228, H.R. 3692, H.R. 3748, H.R. 3817, H.R. 3864, H.R. 3892, and H.R. 3906, on Tuesday, June 22, 2021 at 3:00 p.m. Your testimony was extremely helpful in defining the Committee's understanding of the issues.

While many questions were asked during the hearing, the Subcommittee has an additional question attached for your reply. Please provide your written responses to the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Policy Aide, Ms. Casey MacLean, no later than **Wednesday July 7, 2021**. Committee Rule 3(o) requires that responses be submitted within 10 business days of the hearing.

We appreciate your time and insight, and we remain grateful for your contribution to the Subcommittee's work. Should you have any questions, please contact Ms. MacLean at (202) 875-0126.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources

Attachment: Questions for the Record from Rep. Sablan and Rep. Graves

Questions from Rep. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan

1. Several parts of this bill call upon the Department of Interior to leverage their resources and improve the resilience of the insular areas, tribes, and indigenous communities to the rapidly worsening effects of climate change. How will focusing on equity while lifting up these historically neglected and underrepresented areas and communities benefit everyone in our fight against climate change?

Questions from Rep. Garret Graves

- 1) South Louisiana is home to a truly unique ecosystem – the coastal forest. These forests comprise over one million acres of cypress-tupelo swamp, and represent the final stretch of land connected to the Mississippi River Watershed before it deposits into the Gulf of Mexico. The forests were formed over centuries from the hydrologic patterns of the Mississippi River, which provided alternating periods of drying followed by several months of seasonal flooding on an annual basis. The net result of these hydrologic patterns over thousands of years was an environment uniquely adapted for bald cypress and water tupelo trees to establish and thrive.

However, due to a multitude of natural and man-made changes to the landscape over the past century, these forests are declining at a staggering rate. The loss of these valuable ecosystems represents a significant loss of biodiversity, valuable wildlife habitat, floodwater retention and control, and hurricane and storm surge buffering. Yet perhaps most alarming, these forests would convert from a beneficial carbon sink to a detrimental carbon source.

Restoring the coastal forests of south Louisiana would fulfill many of the enumerated goals of the Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act. Moreover, the grant programs included in this legislation could provide a valuable lifeline to these forests. Unfortunately, I am worried they will not be included in these programs because they are 100% freshwater systems.

Would these forests be considered “blue carbon” under the Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act and, if not, how can we work to have them included in these future grant programs?