

Rep. Jared Huffman Opening Statement

826 words, ~4 min 30 sec

Good morning and welcome to the first WOW legislative hearing of this Congress.

All the bills we're discussing today focus on wildlife conservation and have been previously introduced, most with significant bipartisan support. These bills help protect animals and their habitats while also promoting recreation for Americans from all walks of life - hunters, anglers, hikers, birders, scuba divers, beach-goers, and zoo visitors from all over this country will benefit from legislation we're examining today.

The ACCESS Act, H.R. 1326, introduced by my colleague from California, Mike Thompson, promotes healthy ecosystems and healthy wildlife, both of which provide great benefit to hunters, anglers, and recreation enthusiasts. It reauthorizes key conservation programs and promotes sportsmen and women's interests on our public lands. As we heard from the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership during our state of wildlife hearing two weeks ago, sportsmen and women have been at the forefront of conservation since the late 1800s, advocating for

policies that enhance habitat and increase public lands access. The ACCESS Act includes provisions for wetlands, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Great Lakes monitoring and research, fish habitat, target practice and marksmanship training, the Chesapeake Bay, chronic wasting disease management, and more.

Our Republican colleague Representative Austin Scott introduced H.R. 877, a bill that would amend the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to modernize the funding of wildlife conservation. It would update allowable uses of funds to educate hunters and non-hunters about the role of hunting in wildlife conservation and enhance recruitment for hunting and shooting sports.

Additionally, H.R. 1809, which was just introduced last week by Representative Sablan, our committee's Vice Chair for Insular Affairs, would also amend the Pittman-Robertson Act, along with the Dingell-Johnson Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, to provide much-needed parity for US territories. This long-overdue fix will allow U.S. territories to receive funds from these programs for wildlife conservation projects at the same

level as the states. This bill passed the House by voice vote last Congress, when it was led by our dear friend and former member from Guam, Congresswoman Bordallo.

H.R. 737, the Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act, introduced by Mr. Sablan along with Representative Mike McCaul, the ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, would prohibit the sale of shark fins in the United States. It already has 170 bipartisan cosponsors, and last Congress it had 262 cosponsors when introduced by our former colleague and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee Ed Royce. While shark finning is already illegal in the United States, it's important to make the *trade* of shark fins illegal in the U.S. so that we don't support this inhumane practice abroad and can pressure other countries to do the same.

H.R. 1305, the Albatross and Petrel Conservation Act, introduced by the chair of the Energy and Mineral Resources subcommittee, Alan Lowenthal, and Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, would protect some magnificent, but highly endangered, seabirds. It would implement the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, an international treaty

signed under President Bush in 2001. The effort to join the Agreement has been bipartisan from the start: President Bush transmitted the agreement to the Senate, and it stayed on the priority list of the Obama administration. Joining and implementing the Agreement would elevate conservation efforts for imperiled bird species around the world and it's past time for Congress to act.

Another bipartisan bill is H.R. 1380, the Big Cat Public Safety Act, introduced by Representatives Mike Quigley and Brian Fitzpatrick. Since 1990, there have been about 300 dangerous incidents involving big cats, like lions and tigers, that have resulted in human injuries and death. The Big Cat Public Safety Act would end the ownership of big cats as exotic pets and prohibit exhibitors from allowing the public to have contact with them, keeping these majestic animals and the public safe. While we all love these iconic species, it's important to remember that they are wild animals, and shouldn't be kept as pets or treated like petting zoo animals. Last congress this bill was led by a former Republican member of the Natural Resources committee, Jeff Denham.

Lastly, on the topic of our hearing a few weeks ago, H.R. 1568 the bipartisan SAVE Right Whales Act, would provide funding for research and conservation projects for the North Atlantic right whale. As we heard from Congressman Moulton, expert scientists, and NOAA Fisheries, there is a dire need for congressional action to help the roughly 400 remaining right whales and prevent their extinction.

In our current divisive political climate, these bills offer us an opportunity to do something bipartisan that is positive for wildlife and for our country. Let's give the American people an example that shows Congress can still make smart, common sense policy. I'm looking forward to diving into these issues with you all today.

With that, I want to invite the Ranking Member to say a few remarks, and then we will hear from some of the sponsors of the bills before us today, and then we will welcome and introduce our witnesses.