

QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

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FOR THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE
ON WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON H.R. 925, H.R. 1747, H.R. 2748, H.R. 2854,
H.R. 2918, H.R. 2956, H.R. 3399, H.R. 4340, H.R. 4341, AND H.R. 4348

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Questions from Representative Jeff Van Drew

- 1. How much could coastal districts who rely heavily on healthy habitat to support fisheries and other wildlife for birdwatching, recreation, fishing, and tourism stand to lose economically should wetlands continue to be lost?**

Coastal wetlands – areas where seawater mixes with freshwater to form an environment of varying salinities – provide tremendous benefits for coastal communities. These important areas help protect from storms and flooding by lowering overall flood heights and protecting communities from potentially devastating flood damages. These storm damage services are valued at over \$23 billion dollars annually.¹ Coastal wetlands also help protect water quality by filtering runoff containing pesticides and other pollutants. In addition to these important ecosystem service benefits, coastal wetlands also support substantial tax revenue and job growth. More than one third of adults in the United States hunt, fish, birdwatch, or photograph wildlife found in natural wetlands.²

Unfortunately, human activities are significantly degrading and erasing coastal and marine habitats. Coastal wetlands in the eastern United States were lost at an average rate of 59,000 acres per year between 1998 and 2004.³ Our economy stands to lose literally billions of dollars should these alarming trends continue, with coastal communities being the hardest hit.

- 2. How do wetlands benefit hunters and fishermen?**

Healthy populations of fish and wildlife depend on clean water and abundant wetlands. Hunting and fishing contributes billions of dollars to our economy each year – for example, in 2014 alone anglers generated more than \$100 billion in economic impact and supported 439,000 jobs.⁴

¹ NOAA Fisheries, “Coastal Wetlands: Too Valuable to Lose”, available at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/coastal-wetlands-too-valuable-lose>

² *Id.*

³ US Environmental Protection Agency, “Coastal Wetlands Initiative,” available at <https://www.epa.gov/wetlands/coastal-wetlands>

⁴ NOAA Fisheries, “Coastal Wetlands: Too Valuable to Lose”.

None of that would be possible without healthy habitat – including wetlands – for fish and wildlife. Wetlands are highly productive ecosystems that provide habitat for migratory birds, fish, and many other types of wildlife. In Michigan alone, waterfowl hunting trips, which largely take place in wetland areas, generate \$22 million each year.⁵ Continued loss of wetland habitat will have significant adverse impacts both on fish and wildlife populations, as well as on the hunting and fishing industries.

3. How will the \$18 million increase in annual appropriated funds further wetland conservation?

Increased funding for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund will increase the resources available to carry out wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada, and Mexico to benefit migratory birds and other wildlife. It is heartening to see increases for these important programs in the FY 2020 House Interior/EPA appropriations bill (H.R. 3052).

Earthjustice is also grateful that H.R. 3052 contains much-needed increases for recovery, consultation, and other Endangered Species Act (ESA) programmatic budgets. We urge the Senate to include the same increases for wetlands, ESA, and other conservation programs as those contained in the FY 2020 House bill.

⁵ Michigan Department of Natural Resources, “Wetlands a vital resource for Michigan’s wildlife, environment, citizenry”, available at https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79137_79770_79873_80003-456470--,00.html