

Statement of Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez
The House Committee on Natural Resources
“H.R. 2854 Protect our Refuges Act of 2019”
September 24, 2019

Mr. Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the committee, today I submit this written statement asking for your support of *H.R. 2854 Protect our Refuges Act of 2019*. My legislation will reinstate the Obama-era regulation banning the use of neonicotinoids, which is a group of toxic pesticides connected to the severe decline of bees, migratory birds, and various species protected under the Endangered Species Act.

As members of the Natural Resource Committee, it is our duty to uphold and maintain the biological integrity, diversity and environmental health of America’s public lands and waters, especially our Wildlife Refuges.

Our National Wildlife Refuge System comprises more than 850 million acres of wildlife habitat that supports more than 8,000 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and marine life and at least 380 threatened and endangered species of plants and animals. Allowing for the continued used of neonicotinoids on our refuges directly threatens not only our ecosystem, but 35,000 jobs, countless recreational and educational opportunities, and the billions of dollars generated in local sustainable economic revenue.

Specifically, neonicotinoid use has been linked to adverse ecological effects, including honey-bee colony collapse disorder, and as the depletion of the indigenous bird population due to a reduction in the quantity of in insects. Simply put, neonicotinoids pesticides attack the central nervous system of bees resulting in paralysis and eventual death, making pollination nearly impossible, which has devastating affects to the environment. Additionally, recent studies from the National Toxicology Program reveal that not only do neonicotinoids cause harm to our nation’s pollinators, but also has detrimental effects on human health.

Just last week *Science Magazine* published a report illustrating a decline of 3 billion birds in North America. The researchers cite a variety of potential causes for the loss of birds, including habitat degradation, urbanization and the use of toxic pesticides. In a time where North America has lost more than a quarter of its entire bird population, we must combat all relative contributions; including banning the use of toxic pesticides such as neonicotinoids on our Wildlife Refuges. We cannot afford to damage our ecological systems any further.

The EPA’s reversal of the ban of neonicotinoid pesticides on National Wildlife Refuges is damaging to the environment and public lands overall; this measure is just one more example of the nonsensical deregulatory agenda that this administration continues to pursue.

By rescinding this regulation without first completing an interagency consultation on the impacts on endangered species, the Fish & Wildlife Service has, with no consequence, violated the Endangered Species Act. This violation of federal law cannot go unheeded, and a legislative solution by Congress is required to ensure that agencies do not abandon their responsibility to protecting wildlife and public lands.

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The Protect our Refuges Act of 2019 bans this harmful pesticide by canceling the current registration and prohibiting any future use of neonicotinoid pesticides on ALL National Wildlife Refuges.

I respectfully request that you please join me in supporting this Act, protecting public health and our nations wildlife refuges.

Thank you.