

Member Panel
WOW Subcommittee Leg Hearing
9.24.2019

Good afternoon Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member
McClintock and fellow members of the subcommittee:

I want to start by thanking the Chairman and the Ranking
Member for allowing my bill, HR 1747, to receive a
legislative hearing today. I also want to thank the
witnesses for being here to discuss these important
pieces of legislation. Finally, I want to thank
Congressman Veasey for being an original cosponsor on
HR 1747 and for his support.

HR 1747, the National Fish Habitat Conservation Through Partnerships Act (NFHCTPA), was modeled after two of the most successful conservation endeavors in our nation's history – the state- and locally-led collaborative Joint Venture (JVs) model for implementing voluntary conservation actions on the ground to conserve birds and their habitats; and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) Program which for 30 years has proven to be one of the most successful conservation programs in the U.S. by utilizing a state-led collaborative process.

This legislation codifies the National Fish Habitat Partnerships, an initiative that aims to achieve measurable habitat conservation results through strategic partnerships that lead to better fish habitat conditions and increased fishing opportunities. This program has been and will continue to be driven by local and regionally-based Fish Habitat Partnerships. The partnerships are comprised of representatives of federal, state and local agencies, conservation and sportsmen's organizations, private landowners and the business sector. These partnerships have already led to over 840 successful conservation projects in 50 states benefitting fish habitat and anglers throughout the country.

HR 1747 allows Congress to further refine how the NFHP program operates. For example, this legislation adds more diverse representation onto the current NFHP Board, broadening the input of stakeholders. The Board, which recommends local projects implemented through Fish Habitat Partnerships to the Secretary of the Interior for funding approval, will be led permanently by state fish and wildlife agencies with clarified federal agency representation and more diverse NGO representation including organizations from the agricultural and private industry sectors.

Congressional authorization through this legislation would codify the roles of involved parties and help secure an avenue for consistent funding for on-the-ground fish and aquatic habitat conservation in the states. Currently, under the existing NFHP, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) determines project selection and funding awards regardless of Board recommendations. This legislation provides an added layer of transparency and public involvement in project selection. Of the funding authorized in this legislation, only five percent can go to administrative purposes, meaning that more money will go to work to conserve fish habitat.

Our nation's 49 million recreational anglers generate over \$48 billion in retail sales with a \$115 billion impact on our economy. This industry also supports 800,000 jobs which depend on healthy fisheries resources.

Healthy waterways and fish populations are absolutely critical to providing clean water and sustainable fisheries.

This legislation will protect and restore aquatic communities around the nation through public-private partnerships to promote conservation.

This legislation has the support of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation as well as the American

Sportfishing Association, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and Backcountry Hunters and Anglers.

This legislation takes the current program and makes it more effective. By increasing transparency, putting power back in the hands of stakeholders, and requiring accountability to Congress, HR 1747 will make sure taxpayer dollars go further to conserve fish habitat.

Thank you for your consideration of HR 1747 and I urge the subcommittee's support of this legislation.