

## **STATEMENT ON BILLS**

**H.R. 4723, Salmon Focused Investments in Sustainable Habitats Act (Salmon FISH Act)**

**H.R. 5548, Fishery Failures: Urgently Needed Disaster Declaration Act (Fishery FUNDD Act)**

**January 14, 2020**

**[792 words, ~ 4 minutes 30 seconds]**

In my district and throughout the Pacific Northwest, salmon have great ecological, cultural, and economic importance. Protecting salmon populations now is necessary to ensure they will be around in the future, for Tribes that have depended on salmon since time immemorial, commercial fishermen who rely on healthy fisheries for their livelihoods, and recreational anglers like myself, who love to spend their free time on the water casting for salmon.

H.R. 4723, the Salmon Focused Investments in Sustainable Habitats, or Salmon FISH Act, seeks to identify core centers of salmon abundance and ensure these areas receive the protection,

support, and funding they need in order to continue to sustain thriving salmon populations.

The concept behind the Salmon FISH Act is very simple – let’s identify the most pristine salmon habitat across the country and take steps to ensure the exceptional quality of this habitat is maintained. Restoring degraded habitat is also important, but my bill takes a different approach by proactively investing in the country’s best salmon habitat and protecting these areas from becoming degraded in the first place.

To accomplish this, H.R. 4723 directs NOAA and the Fish and Wildlife Service to work with other federal agencies, tribes, states, and NGOs to identify core centers of salmon abundance, diversity, and productivity as “salmon conservation areas.”

Once a salmon conservation area has been identified, the area is prioritized for US Forest Service road decommissioning and fish passage projects, and actions in these areas are subject to strict review under the National Environmental Policy Act. The bill also establishes a five-year grant program to fund research,

monitoring, and small restoration projects to give these already pristine areas any small boost they may need to maintain habitat quality and maximize the potential of these areas to sustain thriving salmon populations.

Lastly, the bill recognizes good work already being done by agencies like the Forest Service, and provides five years' worth of additional funding for existing watershed health programs that benefit salmon.

We shouldn't wait until salmon habitat has been degraded to invest in restoration. Proactively investing in high-quality habitat is a less expensive, more efficient way to increase the resilience of our salmon populations than waiting to act until habitat is lost or seriously degraded.

Next I'd like to speak on H.R. 5548, the Fishery FUND Act. I'm proud to lead this bipartisan bill with my colleagues Representative Palazzo, Kilmer, and Herrera Beutler, and

appreciate the work of Senator Wicker and his colleagues leading this in the Senate. This is an important step forward for communities in my district and throughout the country who have suffered not only due to fishery disasters, but also due to the impacts of delayed disaster relief under a slow and often frustrating process. This bill would clarify the disaster request process by specifying criteria for evaluating requests, eligible uses of relief funding, and specifying the information required for disaster requests and spend plans. That way, everyone is on the same page and can work through the process more efficiently.

Perhaps most importantly, this bill would make sure the federal fishery disaster relief program works the way it's supposed to by setting timelines to ensure federal agencies are responding to impacted communities faster than what we've seen in the past.

For example, in my district, domoic acid blooms closed the Dungeness crab season in 2015-2016. A request was made in February 2016, but a determination wasn't made until January

2017. That timeline would be 120 days under this bill, rather than the 344 days it took for NOAA to declare the disaster.

Funds were then appropriated for this disaster, along with others, in February 2018. We fought hard to get that funding in Congress, and that's something we'll continue to do in the future. But funding allocated to the Dungeness closure didn't reach North coast communities until April 2019. Under this bill that timeline would be 90 days after spending plans are submitted, rather than the 444 days it took for relief funding to reach those impacted.

I could go on, and I know the Yurok Tribe has had a very similar experience after devastating salmon closures in recent years, but my point is, it shouldn't take nearly 5 years.

On the North Coast of California, we've seen how ocean heat waves, domoic acid blooms, and drought have led to devastating consequences for our most important fisheries. Unfortunately,

it's likely we're going to keep seeing fishery disasters, especially with climate change, so it is critical that we help fishing communities and Tribes when disasters happen.

Thank you to Vice Chairman Myers and Mr. Clifford for being here to testify on these two bills. I look forward to hearing from you.