

House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Legislative Hearing
Submitted by Congressman Ted W. Lieu (CA-33)
July 29, 2021

Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member Bentz, thank you for holding this hearing and for allowing me to speak in support of my legislation H.R. 2325, the Bear Protection Act. I am proud to have re-introduced this bipartisan legislation alongside my colleagues Representatives Rodney Davis, Ann Kuster, Glenn Thompson, and Mike Thompson.

The Bear Protection Act, if passed, would prohibit the import, export, possession, transport, interstate commerce, and foreign commerce of bear viscera. This prohibition would conserve bear populations and protect them from commercial exploitation.

About Bear Poaching

All eight species of bear are afforded protection under Appendices I and II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Further, killing animals to trade in their body parts is against the principles of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Yet, in the United States, federal and state officials have revealed that American bears have been poached for their viscera. Officers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have additionally reported that bear viscera and other bear parts are exported in foreign commerce and are sold domestically on the black market. This poaching poses a threat to the protection of bears.

While some species of bears are not critically endangered, it is not possible to tell if viscera or bile is from an endangered bear, once that product has been extracted from the animal. This reality can provide cover for poachers and will continue to put these majestic animals at risk and subject them to inhumane treatment. I will spare you all of the tragic, painful, and traumatizing stories of how these bears are hunted, captured, imprisoned, abused, and even poisoned. We have an opportunity to put these upsetting stories behind us and ensure our bear populations are protected for generations to come.

About the Bear Protection Act

This bill, while limited in scope, would be effective in mitigating the trade of bear parts and products. Through the Lacey Act, the federal government has the responsibility of enforcing the ban on illegal wildlife trafficking in interstate and foreign commerce.

It has long been recognized that states have a central role in wildlife management. As of July 2020, forty states prohibit trade in bear gallbladders and bile, but these laws vary drastically from state-to-state, and this patchwork of laws harms enforcement. H.R. 2325 would allow the federal government to play a complementary role to the states in protecting bear species.

The Bear Protection Act does not take the power from states to manage their resident bear populations or impact state abilities to regulate bear hunting seasons or methods of hunting. I am confident that good faith sportsmen will not be impacted by this legislation.

Conclusion

This measure has been introduced in previous Congresses and has passed the Senate twice. I am proud that the Bear Protection Act boasts bipartisan cosponsors and is supported by Animal Wellness Action, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Natural Resources Defense Counsel.

The Bear Protection Act will assist to conserve bears and protect them from senseless poaching and abuse. This bill falls clearly within the subcommittee's mission to protect endangered and threatened wildlife. I respectfully request that the Subcommittee support the Bear Protection Act and I thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you.