

**Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife**

Legislative Hearing

June 16, 2022

The Department of the Interior, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record on H.R. 6949, the Delaware River Basin Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2022, and H.R. 7398, the Prohibit Wildlife Killing Contests Act of 2022.

H.R. 6949, Delaware River Basin Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2022

The Service supports H.R. 6949, which will reauthorize the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program (DRBRP) through Fiscal Year (FY) 2030. This legislation would make several changes to the DRBRP's grant program, including increasing the federal cost share for projects that serve small, rural, or underserved communities. H.R. 6949 would also authorize the Secretary to waive the non-federal cost share if a grant recipient is unable to pay or would face significant financial hardship in paying the non-federal match. Finally, H.R. 6949 would repeal a prohibition on the use of program funds for land acquisition.

Following the enactment of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (P.L. 114-322) in 2016, the Service established the DRBRP to develop a comprehensive and collaborative approach to restore and protect the Delaware River watershed. This voluntary, non-regulatory program brings partners together across the four-state watershed in pursuit of a shared vision: restoring and protecting the watershed's natural resources for the benefit of wildlife and people. Guided by a partner-developed strategic framework, the DRBRP prioritizes conservation activities in four key areas: restoring fish and wildlife habitat, improving water quality, reducing flooding and runoff, and enhancing recreational opportunities and access for stakeholders.

The DRBRP's grant program, the Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund (Fund), helps implement these priorities by awarding matching grants to on-the-ground conservation projects. Since 2018, the Fund has awarded nearly \$27 million to 123 projects, which have generated \$46 million in matching funds. This amounts to a total conservation impact of \$73 million.

Recent awards have supported efforts to protect Eastern brook trout habitat through invasive species management in New York; increase cover crops in rural Kent County, Delaware, to improve water quality and habitat for migratory birds; conduct a watershed assessment study and develop a restoration plan to benefit an environmental justice community in Avondale Borough, Pennsylvania; and develop a water trail and recreational programming in urban Camden, New Jersey. These projects have resulted in far-reaching benefits for fish, wildlife, and people. In total, the DRBRP has helped partners restore 100 miles of stream habitat and 500 acres of wetlands and open over 5,000 acres of land and water to new or improved public access.

Building off this history of success, H.R. 6949 would enable continued progress toward shared conservation goals in the Delaware River watershed. The DRBRP demonstrates the power of collaborative, landscape-scale conservation in tackling 21st century conservation challenges, and we appreciate the bill sponsor and the Subcommittee's continued support for this important program.

The Service also appreciates this bill's focus on ensuring equitable access to funding for small, rural, and underserved communities. The non-federal cost share requirement for the DRBRP's grant program can serve as a barrier to participation for many of the communities that would most benefit from this funding. Watershed partners have already begun prioritizing investments that foster equity and justice, and this bill's changes to the cost-share requirements would complement and advance that ongoing work, as well as the Administration's *Justice40* and *America the Beautiful* initiatives.

The Service would welcome the opportunity to discuss with the bill sponsor and the Subcommittee an additional suggested edit to H.R. 6949 regarding P.L. 114-322's prohibition on the net gain of Federal employees for the administration of the DRBRP.

H.R. 7398, Prohibit Wildlife Killing Contests Act of 2022

H.R. 7398 would prohibit any person from organizing, sponsoring, conducting, or participating in a wildlife killing contest on public land. A wildlife killing contest is defined as an event in which participants kill wildlife—excluding fish, shellfish, and crustaceans—for cash, prizes, or other inducements. This legislation would direct the heads of each public land management agency to issue regulations to carry out this prohibition. H.R. 7398 provides exceptions for field trials, contests that target ungulates or certain birds, and lethal control actions by State or Federal agencies that target invasive species, as identified by the National Invasive Species Information Center.

This legislation would likely have minimal impact on the Service's administration of the National Wildlife Refuge System, as the Service generally does not permit wildlife killing contests on national wildlife refuges. While field trials, fishing tournaments, and contests for invasive species control are sometimes permitted on refuges, H.R. 7398 contains exceptions for these activities.

The Services suggests a technical edit to this legislation to clarify the exceptions for contests that target invasive and injurious species. Additionally, the Service suggests that the Subcommittee and the bill sponsor discuss this legislation with State fish and wildlife agencies, given the additional constraints it may place on their management priorities and discretion. Further, the Department recommends extending the timeframe outlined in H.R. 7398 from one year to two years, to develop new regulations and update all administrative policies necessary to carry out this bill.