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H.R. 1676, H.R. 3538, H.R. 3857, AND H.R. 3858

LEGISLATIVE HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

Tuesday, June 24, 2025

Serial No. 119–34

Printed for the use of the Committee on Natural Resources

Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.govinfo.gov
or
Committee address: http://naturalresources.house.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE
60–951 PDF WASHINGTON : 2026

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON

NATURAL RESOURCES

CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members

From: Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries staff: Annick Miller (annick.miller@mail.house.gov), Doug Levine (doug.levine@mail.house.gov), Kirby Struhar (kirby.struhar@mail.house.gov), and Thomas Shipman (thomas.shipman@mail.house.gov) x583311

Date: Monday, June 23, 2025

Subject: Legislative Hearing on 4 Bills

The Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will hold a legislative hearing on four bills: H.R. 1676 (Rep. Donalds), *"Make SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025"*; H.R. 3538 (Rep. Garbarino) *"Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025"*; H.R. 3857 (Rep. Hurd), *"Snow Water Supply Forecasting Reauthorization Act of 2025"*; and H.R. 3858 (Rep. Dingell), *"Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025"* on **Tuesday, June 24, 2025, at 10:15 a.m. in Room 1324 Longworth House Office Building.**

Member offices are requested to notify Jackson Renfro (jackson.renfro@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, June 23, 2025, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- House Committee on Natural Resources Republicans are holding a legislative hearing on four bills that streamline bureaucratic processes, expand protections for animals rescued from the illegal wildlife trade, ensure access to the most up-to-date scientific data in water management, and promote recreational activities on our nation's waters.
- H.R. 1676 furthers the Trump administration's desire to promote government efficiency [1] by approving State Wildlife Action Plans in a timely manner.
- H.R. 3538 provides accountability for, and greater oversight of, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's efforts to take care of wildlife seized by law enforcement investigating trafficking or other illegal activities.
- H.R. 3857 reauthorizes a critical program that empowers water managers to make decisions based upon the best available science.
- H.R. 3858 bolsters America's outdoor recreation economy by reauthorizing and reforming the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund.

II. WITNESSES

Panel I (Members of Congress):

- ***TBD***

Panel II

- **Mr. David Miko,** Acting Deputy Director of Operations, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC [H.R. 1676, H.R. 3538 and H.R. 3858]

Panel III

- **Mr. Roger Young,** Executive Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Tallahassee, Florida [H.R. 1676]
- **Mr. Craig Hoover,** Executive Vice President, Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Bethesda, Maryland [H.R. 3538]
- **Ms. Candice Hasenyager,** Director of the Utah Division of Water Resources, Salt Lake City, Utah [H.R. 3857]
- **Mr. Michael Shields,** President, American Fishing Wire, Coatesville, Pennsylvania [H.R. 3858] (*Minority Witness*)

III. BACKGROUND

H.R. 1676 (Rep. Donalds), *"Make SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025"*

In 2000, Congress amended the Pittman-Robertson Act to include a subaccount known as the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Account (Account).[2] This Account provides appropriated funding to states and territories for wildlife restoration and conservation.[3] The Program funds must be used "for the development, revision, and implementation of wildlife conservation and restoration plans and programs."[4]

These plans, known as State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs), serve as a blueprint for identifying each state's and territory's unique conservation needs. Congress required each SWAP to provide information addressing eight elements: 1) distribution and abundance of wildlife species; 2) locations and condition of key habitats and community types; 3) wildlife and habitat threats; 4) conservation actions to address these threats; 5) plans for monitoring species, habitats and the effectiveness of conservation actions; 6) plans for review and adaptive management of the strategy; 7) plans to coordinate strategy development, implementation, and review with federal, state, local agencies, and Indian tribes; and 8) opportunities for broad public participation in plan development and implementation.[5]

In 2000, Congress also created the State Wildlife Grant Program (SWGP) to provide funding to state and territory fish and wildlife agencies to implement their SWAPs.[6] The apportionment formula is one-third based on the total land area of the state and two-thirds based on each state's population.[7] By law, states must have an updated SWAP to receive funding through the SWGP. These SWAPs must be updated every 10 years. 44 states, the District of Columbia, and three territories are up for renewal in 2025.[8]

In the past, the approval process for SWAPs has taken as long as 18 months due to bureaucratic delays at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). To help address these delays and the upcoming increase of SWAPs for review, in December of 2024, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Service entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to encourage more timely reviews of SWAPs[9] and worked together to develop a simplified review procedure.[10]

H.R. 1676, introduced by Representative Byron Donalds (R–FL-19), follows up on work done through the MOU by directing the Secretary of the Interior to approve SWAPs within 180 days of submission. If the Secretary does not approve the SWAP within 180 days, the SWAP is automatically deemed approved. The bill has bipartisan support.

H.R. 3538 (Rep. Garbarino), *"Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025"*

In 2023, the Service partnered with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) to launch a pilot program in southern California known as the "Wildlife Confiscations Network" (the Network).[11] The Network provides "a coordinated response for the care and well-being of wildlife confiscated from illegal trade."[12] From 2015 to 2019, the Service confiscated 48,793 individual animals involved in illegal wildlife trade, each of which needed to be housed after seizure.[13] According to AZA, since the Network was established, it has assisted with over 135 wildlife trafficking cases in southern California and housed over 4,100 animals in qualified facilities.[14]



A turtle that was rescued from illegal trade by the Wildlife Confiscation Network. **Source:** Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

Sponsored by Representatives Andrew Garbarino (R–NY-02) and Mike Quigley (D–IL-05), H.R. 3538 would authorize a nationwide program modeled on the Network's work in southern California. The Service would administer the national Network and would assist federal wildlife law enforcement agencies, such as the Service, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, with placing confiscated animals in a qualified facility. A committee would be established to review applications from facilities that wish to join the Network. The committee would be made up of representatives from the Service and various animal care facilities, including zoos and aquariums.

Specifically, the functions of the Network would be to: 1) establish response protocols for confiscated animals; 2) create and maintain a database of qualified facilities to house confiscated animals; 3) establish a committee to review an application for facilities that seek inclusion in the Network; and 4) act as the point of contact for federal wildlife law enforcement agencies to assist in housing confiscated animals.

H.R. 3538 would authorize $5 million per year to administer the program through Fiscal Year (FY) 2030.

H.R. 3857 (Rep. Hurd), *"Snow Water Supply Forecasting Reauthorization Act of 2025"*

Established in 2020 by the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program Authorization Act,[15] the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program (SWSFP) encourages the use of emerging technologies to enhance snow monitoring and subsequent water supply forecasts. The program is administered by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and provides cost-sharing on a competitive basis for a broad range of participants to conduct snow monitoring and water supply forecasting projects.



Snowpack in Glacier National Park. **Source:** Daily Inter Lake.

In 2021, Reclamation submitted a report to Congress that described how it would coordinate the deployment of new technologies to monitor snowpack. After submitting the report, Reclamation began targeted implementation of this effort by expanding remote sensing pilots like Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) and satellite imagery.[16] Accurate models and water supply forecasts are essential in the western United States, where over half of the annual stream flow is sourced from snowmelt runoff.[17] Reclamation's 2021 report to Congress detailed ten emerging technologies that, at the time of publication, were not widely used but were predicted to mature enough to be usable in water supply forecasts within five years.[18]

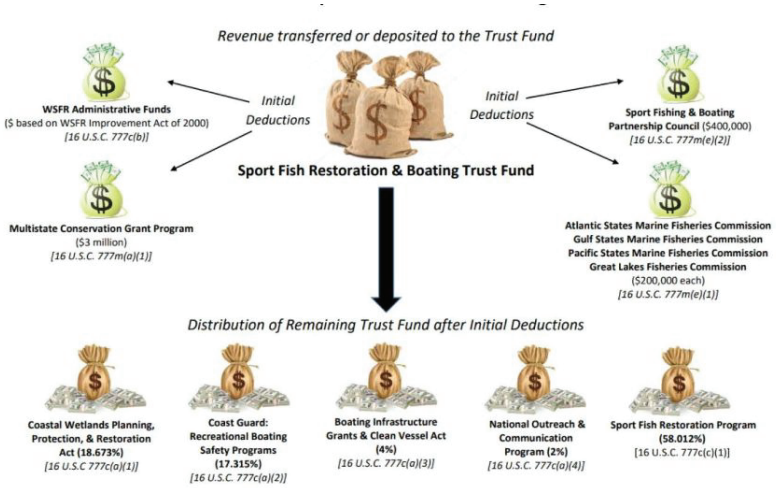
These technologies were rooted in air- and space-based technologies, ground-based technologies, and modeling platforms. Air- and space-based technologies include aircraft-mounted LiDAR, which precisely maps snow depth and can be used to predict information on how much water is being held as snow. This can be paired with various methods of satellite imagery.[19] These imagery methods can help construct 3D models, providing accurate information about snow depth and how clean or dirty the snow is, which affects how quickly it melts.[20] From the ground, net radiometers measure energy from the sun and ground heat, which can be used to improve science.[21] The Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program also takes advantage of advanced modeling systems like the Snow Data Assimilation System (SNODAS) that combines observation technology and weather modeling to predict snowfall across the United States. A web of different modeling systems, like SNODAS and the Snow Water Artificial Neural Network, a machine learning system used to estimate precipitation data,[22] combined with ground- and air-based technologies provide Reclamation with accurate, up-to-date information and data to conduct snow monitoring and water supply forecasting. This allows water managers to make effective decisions and provides greater certainty to end users.

H.R. 3857, which is sponsored by Representatives Jeff Hurd (R–CO-03) and Joe Neguse (D–CO-02), reauthorizes the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program at existing funding levels through FY 2031.

H.R. 3858, (Rep. Dingell), *"Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025"*

Created in 1950 with the passage of the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fishing Restoration Act, the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (SFRBTF) supports a diverse array of projects, including habitat restoration, hatchery maintenance, and the construction of boat ramps in all 50 states and five territories.[23] SFRBTF funding originally came from federal excise taxes on recreational fishing equipment.[24] However, by the late 1970s, demand for projects had begun to outpace available funding.[25] To increase revenue, Congress passed the Wallop-Breaux Amendment in 1984, which expanded the range of taxable tackle and sport

fishing equipment and added a federal tax on fuel used by motorboats and small engines.[26]



Distribution of funds from the SFRBTF. **Source:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Led by Representatives Debbie Dingell (D–MI-06) and Rob Wittman (R–VA-01), H.R. 3858 would reauthorize the SFRBTF through FY 2031. Under current law, the authorization for the fund would expire at the end of FY 2026. Additionally, the bill would make technical improvements to enhance the program's efficiency. Specifically, H.R. 3858 would reduce the tax on aerated bait buckets from 10 percent to 3 percent. When sold as a unit, aerated bait buckets are currently subject to a 10 percent excise tax. However, when sold as separate components, an aerator and a bucket are not subject to an excise tax.[27] The proposed change would reduce the competitive disadvantage faced by manufacturers of aerated bait buckets and enable more competitive pricing.

H.R. 3858 would also change the annual apportionment for the four Interstate Fisheries Commissions (Atlantic States, Gulf States, Pacific States, and Great Lakes) from a flat amount to a percentage. Despite inflation and the growth of the SFRBTF, the $200,000 annual allocation to each commission has remained flat since the 1980s, diminishing their respective purchasing power.[28] The bill proposes that each commission receive 0.0375 percent of the annual appropriation, which, based on the fund's value in recent years, would equate to an amount between $250,000 and $275,000 annually.[29] With increased funding, the commissions would be able to address issues like aquatic invasive species and revive important habitat work that benefits coastal fisheries.

Lastly, H.R. 3858 would expand domestic fuel options for boaters. This change would add an additional priority section under the Boating Infrastructure Grant program for alternative marine fuel facilities, which use fuels derived from sources like cooking oil waste, animal fats, and plant-based materials. Such a change would both boost applications for projects that include alternative fuel facilities and provide boaters with more domestic fuel options.

IV. MAJOR PROVISIONS & ANALYSIS

H.R. 1676 (Rep. Donalds), *"Make SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025"*

Section 2. Timing of Approval of Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program.

- Requires the Service to approve or deny SWAPs within 180 days of being submitted.
- If a SWAP is not approved or denied within 180 days of being submitted, the SWAP is automatically deemed approved.

H.R. 3538 (Rep. Garbarino), *"Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025"*

Section 4. Wildlife Confiscations Network.

- Establishes a voluntary, cooperative program to assist federal wildlife law enforcement agencies with the placement and care of confiscated animals.
- Establishes a committee within this program to review facilities' applications to be a part of the "Wildlife Confiscation Network" to house confiscated animals.

Section 5. Authorization of Appropriations.

- Authorizes $5 million a year to administer the program through FY 2030.

H.R. 3857 (Rep. Hurd), *"Snow Water Supply Forecasting Reauthorization Act of 2025"*

Section 2. Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program.

- Reauthorizes the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program at existing funding levels through FY 2031.

H.R. 3858 (Rep. Dingell), *"Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025"*

Section 2. Division of Annual Appropriations.

- Reauthorizes the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund through FY2031.
- Section 3. Funding for Interstate Fisheries Commission Activities.
- Switches apportionments for the four Interstate Fisheries Commissions from a flat $200,000 per year to 0.0375% of the annual appropriation of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund.

Section 4. Boating Infrastructure Priorities.

- Adds alternative marine fuels to the priority's subsection of the Boating Infrastructure Grant program.

Section 5. Three Percent Rate for Portable, Electronically-Aerated Bait Containers.

- Reduces the tax on aerated bait buckets from 10 percent to three percent.

V. COST

A formal cost estimate from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is not yet available for any of the bills.

VI. ADMINISTRATION POSITION

The Trump administration's position on any of the bills is unknown at this time.

VII. EFFECT ON CURRENT LAW

H.R. 1676

https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/h.r.__1676__ramseyer.pdf

H.R. 3857

https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/h.r.__3857__ramseyer.pdf

H.R. 3858

https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/h.r.__3858__ramseyer.pdf

[1] EO 14158
[2] "The Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act." Congressional Research Service. October 12, 2022. https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IF/PDF/IF12229/IF12229.1.pdf.
[3] *Id.*
[4] Public Law 106-553, Federal Funding Fiscal Year 2001. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-106publ553/pdf/PLAW-106publ553.pdf.
[5] *Id.* "The Eight Required Elements to include in Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plans (State Wildlife Action Plans)." Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/5815/7125/4229/SWAP_Eight_Required_Elements.pdf.
[6] "The State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Programs: 20 Years of Conservation Success." September 2020, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/2616/0087/6829/STWG_2020_Report_Final.pdf.
[7] "About State Wildlife Action Plans." Origins of the State Wildlife Action Plans. University of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment. https://seas.umich.edu/ecomgt/swap/About_SWAPs.html.
[8] "State Wildlife Action Plans 2025 Revisions." Wildlife for All. https://wildlifeforall.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WildlifeforAll_SWAP_2025_Revision_List.pdf.
[9] "Memorandum". Paul Rauch and Judy Camuso. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. December 9, 2024. https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/4817/4024/5170/SWAP_Comprehensive_Review_2025_Joint_Memo_Signed_Dec_9-2024-FINAL.pdf.
[10] "SWAP Summary Template" U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. https://fawiki.fws.gov/spaces/WSFRP/pages/26837115/State+Wildlife+Grant+Program?preview=/26837115/344096773/SWAP%20Summary%20Template.xlsx.
[11] "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Association of Zoos and Aquariums announce pilot network in southern California to provide care and welfare for animals confiscated from illegal trade." U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. October 27, 2023. https://www.fws.gov/press-release/2023-10/new-network-gives-hope-animals-trafficked-through-illegal-wildlife-trade.
[12] *Id.*
[13] "Wildlife Confiscation Network Act." Association of Zoos and Aquarium. https://www.aza.org/wildlife-confiscations-network-act#:~:text=From%202015%20to%202019%2C%20the,each%20requiring%20placement%20and%20care.
[14] "Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025 introduced to House of Representatives with endorsement of 60 organizations." Association of Zoos and Aquariums. May 22, 2025. https://www.aza.org/aza-news-releases/posts/wildlife-confiscations-network-act-introduced-to-house-of-representatives.
[15] H.R. 8041. Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program Authorization Act. https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/8041.
[16] Emerging Technologies in Snow Monitoring; A Report to Congress. Bureau of Reclamation. November 2021. https://www.usbr.gov/research/docs/news/Emerging_Snow_Monitoring_Report_508.pdf.
[17] *Id.*
[18] *Id.*
[19] *Id.*
[20] *Id.*
[21] *Id.*
[22] *Id.*
[23] "Sport Fish Restoration." The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. https://www.fws.gov/program/sport-fish-restoration. "Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund. American Sportfishing Association." https://asafishing.org/sport-fish-restoration-and-boating-trust-fund/.
[24] "Sport Fish Restoration Program Reports." Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. August 9, 2022. https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/inport/item/35346.
[25] *Id.*
[26] *Id.*
[27] "Proposed Changes for Next Reauthorization of Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund." Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/updated_sfrbtf_one_pager.pdf.
[28] *Id.*
[29] *Id.*

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON H.R. 1676, MAKE SWAPS EFFICIENT ACT OF 2025; H.R. 3538, WILDLIFE CONFISCATIONS NETWORK ACT OF 2025; H.R. 3857, SNOW WATER SUPPLY FORECASTING REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2025; AND H.R. 3858, SPORT FISH RESTORATION, RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY, AND WILDLIFE RESTORATION ACT OF 2025

Tuesday, June 24, 2025
House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:16 a.m., in room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Harriet Hageman [Chair of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Hageman, LaMalfa, Ezell, Crank; Hoyle, Magaziner, Dingell, Min, Elfreth, Gray, Rivas, Soto, and Huffman.

Also present: Representative Hurd.

Ms. HAGEMAN. The Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will come to order.

Good morning, everyone. I want to welcome members, witnesses, and our guests in the audience to today's hearing.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

Under Committee rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chair and the Ranking Member. I therefore ask unanimous consent that all other members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that the Congressman from Colorado, Mr. Hurd, the Congressman from Florida, Mr. Donalds, and the Congressman from New York, Mr. Garbarino, be allowed to participate in today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

We are here today to consider four legislative measures, H.R. 1676, the Make SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025, sponsored by Representative Donalds of Florida; H.R. 3538, the Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025, sponsored by Representative Garbarino of New York; H.R. 3857, the Snow Water Supply Forecast Reauthorization Act of 2025, sponsored by Representative Hurd of Colorado; and H.R. 3858, the Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025, sponsored by Representative Dingell of Michigan.

I now recognize myself for a 5-minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. HARRIET HAGEMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WYOMING

Ms. HAGEMAN. Today the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will examine four bills.

Our first bill, sponsored by Representative Hurd of Colorado, would reauthorize the Bureau of Reclamation's snow water supply forecasting program.

Mountain snowpack is one of the most important water storage reservoirs that we have in the West. Gathering data regarding our snow conditions throughout the fall, winter, and spring is critical for water supply forecasts relied upon by reservoir operators, farmers, and ranchers, municipalities, and broader water management in the western United States. The program being discussed today promotes the use of emerging technologies like LiDAR to enhance these efforts.

Next we have a bill sponsored by Representative Dingell of Michigan that would reauthorize the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund. This trust fund supports a wide range of conservation projects, and facilitates access to recreational fishing. Its funding comes from Federal excise taxes on recreational fishing equipment and fuels to support projects like habitat restoration and construction of boat ramps.

I would also like to thank the co-lead on this bill, Representative Wittman, for his dedication to this issue.

Third, we have a bill sponsored by Representative Garbarino from New York which builds upon the work the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has done with private partners to take possession of and care for animals that have been confiscated during Federal wildlife trafficking investigations.

Lastly, we have a bill sponsored by Representative Donalds of Florida which furthers a goal shared by both the House Republicans and the Trump administration to promote government efficiency by holding the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service accountable to review State wildlife action plans in a timely manner.

Last year the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service entered into a memorandum of understanding to simplify the review process for these plans. This bill is intended to complement that work.

With that I want to take time to thank our witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to a robust conversation.

Ms. HAGEMAN. When the Ranking Member arrives we will take a moment for her opening statement, but we are going to go ahead and proceed with the hearing at this time. I will now introduce our first panel.

As is typical with legislative hearings, the bills' sponsors are recognized for 5 minutes each to discuss their bills. I now recognize Congressman Hurd for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. JEFF HURD, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF COLORADO

Mr. HURD. Thank you, Chairwoman Hageman, for holding this hearing today. I am grateful that my legislation, H.R. 3857, the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Reauthorization Act, is included in today's hearing.

As we know, water is life. In the West we depend on an adequate snowpack, and the vast majority of our water supply comes from that snowpack. My legislation reauthorize the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program, which encourages the use of new technologies to monitor snow and to forecast water supply. We can say goodbye to the days of determining snowpack by hiking a mountain on foot and using a measuring stick to determine the depth of the snow.

With American ingenuity and scientific advancements we have expanded the use of remote sensing pilots like light detection and ranging, LiDAR, as well as satellite imagery. These imagery methods can help construct 3D models providing adequate information about snow depth and quality. We must give our water managers the necessary tools to ensure that all of our water needs are delivered. Water supply is essential to virtually every industry in the West, from ag to mining to energy to recreation.

I look forward to hearing the testimony today, and I am excited for this bill to move through the Committee.

Mr. HURD. With that, Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The other Members, as you can see, are not yet here for their testimony, so I am going to go directly to the witness.

I want to thank Mr. Hurd for his testimony. And as the others arrive, we will go ahead and have them provide their information.

I want to now introduce our second panel, Mr. Dave Miko, the Acting Deputy Director for Operations at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington, DC.

Under Committee rules, you must limit your oral statement to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony please press the button on the microphone.

And as you know, we use timing lights. When you begin the light will turn green. When you have 1 minute remaining the light will turn yellow. And at the end of 5 minutes the light will turn red and I will ask you to please complete your statement.

I now recognize Mr. Miko for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF DAVID MIKO, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mr. MIKO. Thank you, and good morning, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Dave Miko, the Acting Deputy Director for Operations for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. And thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide the Service's testimony on three bills.

H.R. 1676, the Making SWAPs Efficient Act, would require the Secretary of the Interior to review and approve any State Wildlife Action Plan, or SWAP, within 180 days of submission, or the SWAP would be automatically approved.

States submit SWAPs to receive funding from the State Wildlife Grant program which supports their wildlife conservation efforts. When SWAPs are renewed, States submit them for review to a regional review team composed of Service staff and neighboring

State fish and wildlife agencies. The review process typically takes 6 months. During the last review cycle in 2015, most SWAPs were approved within this time frame. However, some reviews have required additional time to ensure statutory requirements are met.

The Service supports the sponsor's efforts to increase government efficiency and predictability. The President's Fiscal Year 2026 budget request proposes to eliminate funding for the State Wildlife Grant program, and focus on the Service's partnerships with private landowners. The Service will welcome the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee and the bill's sponsor to improve efficiency and reduce burdensome conditions on our conservation partners.

H.R. 3538 directs the Secretary to establish a program to assist Federal wildlife law enforcement agencies with the care of confiscated animals. This program, termed the Wildlife Conservation Confiscations Network, would serve as a single point of contact for law enforcement agencies needing to find care for confiscated animals. As the lead Federal agency for enforcing wildlife laws, the Service is working to implement President Trump's Executive Order 13773, Cracking Down on Wildlife Trafficking by Transnational Criminal Organizations. In 2024 the Service inspected over 185,000 declared shipments valued at over $6.6 billion. That same year the Service's Office of Law Enforcement contributed to nearly 12,000 wildlife crime investigations.

One challenge of our successful enforcement actions is the growing volume of seized live wildlife that need to be placed in animal care facilities. Over the last 6 years the Service has had nearly 1,200 cases involving the interdiction of nearly 73,000 live animals. The Service does not have the capacity or expertise to permanently care for these animals, and we rely on partner facilities to provide care after our law enforcement personnel take possession.

The Service supports the goals of H.R. 3538 to create an accessible network of qualified facilities for the care of confiscated animals. However, the Service is concerned that some provisions may limit our ability to secure care for animals. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the bill's sponsor and the Subcommittee to provide technical assistance on the legislation to improve implementation.

The Service supports H.R. 3858, the Sport Fish Restoration and Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act. This legislation would reauthorize the Sport Fish Restoration Fund for five more years, and make some technical adjustments.

The Sport Fish Restoration Act, also known as the Dingell-Johnson Act, is a cornerstone of America's conservation heritage. Over the past 75 years the Sport Fish Restoration Program has provided over $12 billion to States and territories to conserve sport fish populations, improve access, and increase recreation and education opportunities for the public. The funding supports the operation of over 320 fish hatcheries, stocking more than a billion sport fish annually. Those hatcheries are paired with the operation and maintenance of 9,000 boating and fishing access areas and aquatic education programs for 850,000 people annually.

This would not be possible without the partnerships the Sport Fish Restoration Act is built on. The fund is supported by an excise tax paid by manufacturers and sport fishing equipment, and a gas tax for small engines and motor boats. Our industry partners directly support the conservation, management, and access to the fisheries and waters they rely on.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Miko follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAVE MIKO, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1676, Making SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025; H.R. 3538, Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025; H.R. 3858, Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025

Good morning, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Dave Miko, and I am the Acting Deputy Director for Operations for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony on the following legislation: H.R. 1676, Making SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025; H.R. 3538, Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025; and H.R. 3858, Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025.

H.R. 1676, Making SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025

H.R. 1676, the Making SWAPs Efficient Act of 2025 would amend the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, or Pittman-Robertson Act, to require the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to review and approve State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) within 180 days of submission, or the plans are deemed approved.

In 2000, Congress authorized both a Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program under the Pittman-Robertson Act and a separate State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program, providing $50 million to both programs, and requiring states to submit planning documents to receive funding from either program. As the Service implemented these programs, it determined that the planning documents required by the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program could serve as the State Wildlife Action Plans required by the SWG program. Congress has continued to fund the SWG program since 2000, but has not funded the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program. SWAP requirements under SWG are consistent with the statutory requirements for the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program under the Pittman-Robertson Act, which this bill seeks to amend. Specific requirements for the SWG program are only detailed in annual appropriations legislation.

The State Wildlife Grant program provides funding to states and territories to support state-led conservation. To receive funding, states must develop SWAPs, which are plans for wildlife conservation, wildlife-associated recreation, and wildlife conservation education and provide a strategic framework for prioritizing conservation projects and identifying key species information needs, informing local development and land-use planning. SWAPs must meet specific statutory requirements including use of the best available science to inform conservation plans and methods and identification of priority research and habitat conservation proposals to conserve declining species. SWAPs must be reviewed and approved by the Service, and if necessary, revised every 10 years.

Once state agencies develop a SWAP, they submit it to a Regional Review Team composed of Service staff and neighboring state fish and wildlife agency staff for review. The Regional Review Team evaluates the SWAP and makes a recommendation to Service leadership on whether to approve it. The review process, including communication with the state agency to resolve questions, and final approval, typically takes approximately six months. During the last review cycle in 2015, most SWAPs were reviewed within this timeframe. However, some SWAP reviews required additional time to ensure statutory requirements were met. By October of 2025, 47 states are expected to submit updated SWAPs for review, presenting a significant anticipated workload for Regional Review Teams and the Service.

The Service supports the sponsor's efforts to increase government efficiency and predictability. The President's FY 2026 budget request includes $1.1 billion for the Service and proposes to eliminate funding for the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant

programs, recognizing that Federal dollars should only be spent on critical Federal responsibilities. The Service recognizes that our work to conserve natural resources across broad landscapes benefits from partnerships with States, Tribes and private landowners and is working to empower locally led and funded conservation efforts. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to achieve these goals.

H.R. 3538, Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025

H.R. 3538 directs the Secretary to establish a voluntary, cooperative program, in partnership with a professional accrediting zoological association, to assist federal wildlife law enforcement agencies with the placement and care of confiscated animals. This program, termed the Wildlife Confiscations Network (Network), would establish protocols for animal care, maintain a database of qualified facilities, establish a committee to review membership requests, and serve as the single point of contact for law enforcement agencies needing to care for an animal.

President Trump recognized the serious threat of wildlife trafficking to conservation, national security, and economic prosperity by signing Executive Order (EO) 13773. EO 13773 directed federal law enforcement agencies to strengthen enforcement against transnational criminal organizations that threaten public safety and national security through the "illegal smuggling and trafficking of humans, drugs or other substances, wildlife, and weapons." Once a crime of opportunity carried out on a small-scale, today highly sophisticated criminal organizations, such as Mexican drug cartels and Chinese gangs, illegally traffic wildlife and launder the proceeds into their narcotics, weapons, and human trafficking operations across America's borders and around the globe.

As the lead federal agency for enforcing wildlife laws, the Service's Office of Law Enforcement is already working to implement EO 13773 and support President Trump's efforts to secure the nation's borders. The Service's investigative and enforcement activities are led by roughly 191 special agents and 129 wildlife inspectors stationed domestically and around the globe. In the United States, the Service was responsible for inspecting 185,762 declared shipments, valued at over $6.6 billion in legal commerce, at 18 ports of entry in 2024. In addition, Service special agents are stationed as attachés at 10 U.S. embassies and stations in countries that drive or enable the illegal wildlife trade. In FY 2024, the work of the Service's Office of Law Enforcement personnel contributed to 11,969 wildlife crime investigations, resulting in court-ordered restitution of $2.3 million in fines, $6.4 million in civil penalties, 80 years in prison, and 254 years of probation.

One challenge of our successful enforcement is the growing inventory of seized live wildlife that need to be placed in qualified animal care facilities. From 2019 through June 6, 2025, the Service had 1,189 cases involving the interdiction of 72,989 live animals of which 26,296 are species that are listed under Endangered Species Act (ESA) or the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This means approximately 31 live animals a day, including 11 ESA or CITES-listed species needed to be placed in potentially long-term care, something for which the Service does not have the capacity. We note that providing direct care for seized wildlife does not fall within the primary responsibilities of the Service but is inherently necessary in the enforcement of wildlife laws. While the Service has been able to secure appropriate care for confiscated specimens historically, we are reliant on public and private relationships to meet this need. To build on our existing relationships to address this volume, in 2023 the Service and a private membership organization formed a cooperative agreement to implement a pilot program in Southern California wherein their member facilities were a point of contact to place confiscated specimens. This agreement has been successful in placing over 4,600 animals, of which 980 are listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA, in facilities over the last two years. However, not all specimens were able to be placed in these member facilities, and a need exists to expand the network of facilities outside of a single private organization.

The Service supports the goals of H.R. 3538 to create an accessible network of qualified care facilities and assist the Service's efforts to provide suitable care for any animals seized. However, the Service is concerned that provisions of the bill would limit our ability to obtain care for animals, including those protected by laws other than the ESA or CITES. We defer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for its views on provisions of the bill that may affect their programs. Towards that end, we would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor and the Subcommittee to provide technical assistance on the legislation to clarify and improve implementation to provide the best opportunity for suitable care for those animals seized by the Service.

H.R. 3858, Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025

The Service supports H.R. 3858, which would reauthorize the Sport Fish Restoration Fund for 5 years, and includes some minor technical adjustments.

The Sport Fish Restoration Act, also known as Dingell-Johnson Act, is a cornerstone of America's conservation heritage. Since Congress created the Sport Fish Restoration program in 1950, it has provided over $12 billion for the conservation and restoration of sport fish species, as well as recreational and educational opportunities for the boating and fishing public.

The Sport Fish Restoration Fund provides dedicated, reliable funding to states. It is supported by an excise tax, paid by manufacturers, on sport fishing equipment, as well as import duties on fishing tackle and pleasure boats, and the portion of the gasoline tax attributable to small engines and motorboats. These taxes have helped create a strong federal-state-private partnership, where industry pay a tax to support state-led conservation and enhancement of the natural resources they enjoy. State fish and wildlife agencies, towns, boating and fishing equipment manufacturers, and individuals have been working together for 75 years to ensure America's sport fishing and recreational boating opportunities are some of the best in the world. The U.S. Coast Guard also receives Sport Fish Restoration funding for Boating Safety Programs.

The Sport Fish Restoration program continues to improve fishing opportunities by directly supporting robust sport fisheries, access to sport fishing opportunities, and recruiting and retaining fishing newcomers each year. The program supports fisheries by funding state-led management for over 200 species of sport fish and operation of over 320 hatcheries, stocking more than 1 billion fish annually. The Sport Fish Restoration program also supports the operation and maintenance of over 9,000 fishing and boating access areas annually, including fishing piers and boat ramps, providing the public access to blue-ribbon fisheries and one-of-a-kind recreational areas. Finally, the program supports aquatic education for 850,000 students annually, introducing the next generation to fishing.

The Sport Fish Restoration Fund also includes several programs to enhance recreational boating and protect clean water. The Boating Infrastructure Grant program has funded the construction of 32,000 linear feet of docks over the last five years, as well as other facilities to provide new support for large, non-trailerable, transient recreational boats. The Clean Vessel Act program has supported the construction, renovation, or maintenance of 748 pump out stations over the same time period, protecting water quality in recreational areas.

Outdoor recreation is a powerful driver in our economy, supporting local guides and outfitters, hotels and restaurants, and domestic manufacturers. The federal-state-private partnership supported by the Sport Fish Restoration program drives continuous investments back into the fisheries, recreational areas, and access sites that will continue to support jobs, businesses, and the enjoyment of future generations.

The Service supports H.R. 3858, which will continue this important and impactful work. Reauthorization of the Sport Fish Restoration Fund will support the long-term viability of the natural resources, access, and demand that drive a thriving outdoor recreation economy that supports local communities across the country.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Wonderful, thank you. And now, with some of the other Members arriving, I am going to go ahead and recognize Congresswoman Dingell for 5 minutes.

I know that you were arriving as Mr. Miko was testifying, but he indicated that they support your bill. I just wanted to let you know that. And so please go ahead, thank you.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. DEBBIE DINGELL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And I did read your testimony. I apologize, we have all been in a caucus meeting that went longer than any of us wanted.

Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for including my important bipartisan legislation today, the Sports Fishing Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025 as part of today's hearing.

I want to thank my friend and co-lead, Representative Rob Wittman, for his partnership in reauthorizing this vital program.

For 75 years the Sports Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund has provided critical resources for conservation. First enacted in 1950 through the Dingell-Johnson Sports Fish Restoration Act—and not my husband, by the way, my father-in-law—the trust fund continues to safeguard our environmental heritage and improve access to the outdoors for all Americans. This is done by a decades old user pays public benefits approach which has strengthened the outdoor recreation opportunities for boaters and anglers. It has added 9,000 public access sites, maintained 320 fish hatcheries that stock nearly a billion fish annually, and created education programs that have introduced more than 850,000 people to fishing.

The current Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund is set to expire at the end of this Fiscal Year. My bill would reauthorize the program until 2030, and continue to build upon the $40 billion the program has already put towards funding the State-based conservation programs. States know best.

Recreational boating access and safety, aquatic resources education, and fisheries management and restoration. This bill will strengthen access to outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans. Additionally, it will improve conservation of at-risk habitats and fund resilient efforts that will drive adaptation and mitigation in at-risk areas.

This legislation also cuts taxes. I know, I wanted to see her look. The reauthorization would reduce the tax in aerated bait buckets from 10 percent to 3 percent. Currently, aerated bait buckets, when sold as a unit, are subject to a 10 percent excise tax. When an aerator and a bucket are sold as separate components, they are not subject to an excise tax. This proposed change would reduce the competitive disadvantage faced by manufacturers of aerated bait buckets by enabling more competitive pricing.

And another important piece of this legislation is expanding domestic fuel options for boaters. This change would add an additional priority within the priority subsection of the Boating Infrastructure Grant—easier to call BIG, the BIG program—to incentivize the provisions of alternative marine fuels that provide more domestic fuel options for boaters. This legislation boasts a broad coalition of supporters from boaters, hunters, conservationists, and industry leaders like the National Marine Manufacturers Association.

I again want to thank the Chair for considering this important legislation today that has an important legacy in supporting these issues in this country, and I think we should all go fishing together someday.

[Laughter.]

Mrs. DINGELL. And I encourage my colleagues to support its final passage.

Mrs. DINGELL. And I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I am going to give the Ranking Member just a few moments to settle in, and then I will ask her for her 5-minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. VAL HOYLE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF OREGON

Ms. HOYLE. So, first of all, thank you very much for being here to testify.

Today we are discussing several bills that support wildlife conservation and natural resource management.

Representative Dingell's H.R. 3858 would extend the successful Sport Fish Restoration Program through 2031. For the last 70 years this program has provided steady funding to help States conserve sports fish and maintain fishing and boating opportunities. Today's bill would make sure this important program can continue. It includes improvements to support alternative marine fuels and reduced taxes on certain fishing equipment.

Representative Garbarino's H.R. 3538, the Wildlife Confiscation Network Act, would create a nationwide network to improve coordination between animal care facilities and Federal wildlife law enforcement when illegal wildlife are confiscated. This bill would expand a successful pilot program that has reduced burden on law enforcement while improving the quality of care for trafficked animals.

Organizations in my State, like the Oregon Zoo, the Oregon Coast Aquarium are already stepping up to care for rescued wildlife and invest in anti-poaching education to prevent trafficking from ever happening.

This bill would increase opportunities for wildlife specialists to care for wildlife, allowing Federal law enforcement to spend more time going after criminals. This is a win-win, and true government efficiency. I look forward to hearing more about it.

Representative Hurd's 3857, the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Reauthorization Act, would support investments in modernized water forecasting and improve snowpack monitoring to provide the information that our Western communities need to manage water resources.

Finally, Representative Donalds's H.R. 1676 would establish deadlines for approving State Wildlife Action Plans after States reported delays of over 18 months for approvals.

I agree that the Fish and Wildlife Service should process State Wildlife Action Plans promptly and address unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles that are keeping them from doing so. However, I am concerned that, as currently written, this bill could weaken oversight of how Federal funds are spent on wildlife conservation. I hope this is a technical issue that we can work on in a bipartisan way to address so that we can make progress on the underlying issues identified in this bill while also preserving the accountability Congress intended in the Pittman-Robertson Act.

While I welcome the opportunity to work together on these bipartisan bills, it is hard to reconcile our conversation today with

the Administration's budget proposal that would cut critical existing wildlife conservation programs. For instance, the President's budget seeks to eliminate the State and tribal wildlife grants which benefit recreation and wildlife industries that are important in my district and many others across the country.

The National Wildlife Refuge Fund that pays money to States? Gone.

Cooperative Endangered Species Fund that supports collaborative recovery for endangered species? Gone.

North American Wetlands Conservation, a favorite of hunting and fishing communities in my district and around the country? Gone.

All of us on this Committee know that these aren't just budget line items. These programs represent America's conservation legacy and our commitment to leaving our future generations public lands that they can be proud of and enjoy just as we do.

On top of that, this Administration has fired the non-partisan workers who make these programs so effective. That is not government efficiency. I want to be clear. I support the efforts to make the government more efficient, and I will work with anyone to make that happen. But efficiency without funding and expertise or an alternative is just elimination.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how we can all work together to strengthen America's conservation efforts.

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you, and I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I want to thank the Ranking Member for her opening statement. We are now going to go to questions for the witness, and I am going to begin with myself.

Mr. Miko, H.R. 3538 directs the Secretary to establish a voluntary cooperative program in partnership with a professional accrediting zoological association with existing capacity and expertise. How many organizations are you aware of that meet that definition?

Mr. MIKO. Thank you for the question.

I don't have a clear answer for the exact number of organizations that meet that definition. I do know that our law enforcement officers work across the country with qualified organizations and operations that they rely on to place animals that they confiscate with organizations that have the expertise to care for these animals while those investigations are taking place.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, we definitely want that. But at the same time, my understanding is that the way that this bill is currently drafted, that it actually rather constrains the ability to do so. Simply by the definition, it limits the number of organizations that meet the definition. And I would request that perhaps after this hearing you would be able to get me the information as to what the number is because I want to make sure that we have adequate resources and facilities available to be able to take and care for these animals.

Mr. MIKO. If I may follow up?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yes.

Mr. MIKO. And we share those concerns. And I think it is important to understand, the way the legislation is crafted, that it is focusing on animals that are confiscated at our borders,

Endangered Species, CITES Act violations. Our law enforcement officers are confiscating animals across the country, domestically as well as along our borders, and we confiscated I want to say—since about 2019, 73,000 animals. Around 26,000 of those are collected at our borders or are endangered species or CITES-listed species, which leaves a large number of animals that still require care and placement.

We think it is very important that our law enforcement officers maintain the ability and decision authority to place animals that are part of an investigation in facilities they are comfortable with and will best suit those animals as they work through an investigation. We do know that, we are collecting animals at all hours of the day and night, all days of the week. And having facilities that are accessible to us immediately allows us to get back to our law enforcement activities.

It is also important, again, in those unique situations where we maybe confiscate large cats, we know facilities that take large cats that we can rely on to place those animals. So it is a complex.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Conundrum.

Mr. MIKO. Conundrum is a great word, yes, I appreciate it.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, what I also want to find out is what safeguards does the Service have in place currently to ensure that wildlife confiscations are done to the letter of the law, and that any confiscated animal is adequately cared for? What are the safeguards in place?

Mr. MIKO. So we certainly follow the letter of the law when we confiscate animals. And again, working at the local level with those facilities that we have built relationships with, and understand that they are also law-abiding facilities and have the capacity to care for those unique animals that are confiscated.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. I am going to switch gears just a little bit.

Given the number of State Wildlife Action Plans due for an update this year—and there is over 40 of them—there must have been some planning at the Service in collaboration with the States to expedite the review and approval process. Can you share any examples of efficiencies the Service is working to implement to make sure that you can get these SWAPs reviewed in a timely manner?

Mr. MIKO. I appreciate the follow-up question, and we have worked with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies through the States on a guidance memo that has identified some efficiencies through some digital data entry forms that reduce errors, that allow us to manage and work through that process more quickly. We provide technical assistance to States before they even start the process, so they get started on the right foot. We also assure that, as soon as the State submits their State Wildlife Action Plan for review, they are able to access the funds available to them and start working on their priorities.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Wonderful. I am now going to turn to Ms. Elfreth for her 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, Madam Chair. Sorry, just struggling with space constraints in this Committee room.

Thank you, Mr. Miko. It is good to see you. I do want to discuss a little bit of follow-up based on our discussion in May, but I do

want to follow up on the Chair's questioning around the confiscation bill. I am sorry I missed your testimony again. We were in caucus. But I read your testimony. I guess I am concerned with your concerns.

This is a major public policy challenge that this country is facing. Our zoos and aquariums are stepping up in major ways. I am the first alumna of an aquarium to serve in Congress. I served proudly at the National Aquarium in Baltimore, for many years. I guess I am concerned. Did you work with the sponsor of the bill in advance or since before coming here today to try to work out some of your issues with the bill or in any way provide suggestions to strengthen it?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, I appreciate that question, and I love the Baltimore Zoo. I have been there many times myself, and I have got a Christmas ornament on my tree that goes up every year from the Baltimore Zoo and Aquarium. It is a wonderful place, and they take great care of the animals there in their care.

We have worked with AZA on a pilot program in Southern California for a couple of years, and we look at that pilot program as an opportunity to learn what works and what might not work and to help us better understand, moving forward, how we can craft an opportunity to meet the broad needs of the wildlife that need care across the country.

Ms. ELFRETH. And yet you don't believe that this bill accomplishes those needs or meets those needs? I am confused as to your opposition.

Mr. MIKO. Sure. Yes, I believe the bill and the accredited zoos can play an important role as part of a much broader opportunity as we define confiscated animals.

Again, it is limited to those that we take on the border, and that we take under CITES and threatened endangered species. We take species domestically that are neither one of those. About a third of the animals that we confiscate meet the definition that the bill provides, which leaves another two-thirds of the animals. We take about 31 animals a day into possession. Two-thirds of those also need placed, and would not be captured in the bill language as it currently stands. We would love to work to close some of those loops for us.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK. Well, I am very proud to be a co-sponsor of this bill, and I look forward to working with you and the lead sponsor because I always appreciate coming with solutions. So thank you.

I do want to change gears into how you are actually going to implement any of the bills in front of us today. And in May you and I discussed the fact that this Administration has fired tens of thousands of Federal civil servants. I represent 44,000 Federal civil servants in my district. Can you give me any type of follow-up on the 400 employees at Fish and Wildlife who were fired in February? I asked you back in May, you didn't have answers. And I am curious. I am sure you assumed I would follow up in this hearing today. How many employees have been fired, laid off, put on administrative leave, or taken the fork-in-the-road resignation payout from Fish and Wildlife since January 20?

Mr. MIKO. I appreciate the follow-up question, and I really am not in a position to speak on individual personnel matters.

We are preparing from our last hearing, and we take your oversight authority very critically and are working to develop a question for the record in response to your questions from our last hearing.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK. They are not individual personnel matters, though. I am talking holistically across the Department. So I am not sure of the next time you are going to be in front of us, but I highly, highly recommend that you come with some better facts and figures because this is not a mystery. These are public civil servants, many of whom are sitting at home being paid with taxpayer dollars on administrative leave, not doing their jobs, not serving the American people.

OK, I am going to move on to another kind of key piece of your public service to this Nation, which is your field offices. Again, Interior publicly stated its plan to close 150 field offices nationwide. When I asked you in May about the potential of those closures, you said you did not have the information available. Again, this is where our constituents can actually meet you and take advantage of the services that their tax dollars pay for. Can you give me any update on those field offices that you intend to close?

Mr. MIKO. I appreciate the follow-up question. Our staff members that are with the Service are dedicated staff members.

Ms. ELFRETH. Of course they are, yes.

Mr. MIKO. They are focused on delivering outcomes, positive outcomes for the American people.

Ms. ELFRETH. No one is questioning that.

Mr. MIKO. And they are continuing to do that work.

Ms. ELFRETH. But how many field offices do you plan to close, and when?

Mr. MIKO. I would be happy to follow up with you.

Ms. ELFRETH. Is there a better means than these hearings to follow up?

Mr. MIKO. We would, again, appreciate the opportunity to follow up with you.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK. Then we are going to call you this afternoon and schedule a one-on-one hearing. And I invite any member of this Committee to sit with us and have this conversation, or else we are going to continue to have this very public debate every time you come to this Committee.

With that I yield back. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Ezell for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Madam Chair.

As an avid hunter and fisherman my entire life, I have practiced restoration and conservation my entire life. One of the best ways the State can manage conservation is using funds through the State Wildlife Action Plans, or SWAPs, as part of the Pittman-Robertson Act. SWAPs help appropriate funds to streamline projects and conservation needs on a State-by-State basis. From monitoring species to wildlife threats, SWAPs are a much-needed aspect for conservation. Yet it appears the bureaucrats in Washington are once again withholding funds.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has taken up to 18 months to approve funds for SWAPs. As such, Mr. Donalds's bill, H.R. 1676, expedite SWAPs if they are not approved within a 180-day time frame. This bill cuts bureaucratic red tape, and I fully support this much-needed legislation.

Mr. Miko, SWAPs are required to be updated every 10 years, and over 40 States and territories have SWAPs due this year. You touched on this in your testimony, but can you please expand on what that revision process looks like, and how many levels of Service review SWAPs currently go through, and what role does the Federal Government play?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, thank you for your question, Congressman.

And we are tracking, we believe, 47 SWAPs that are due this year, and they go through quite a rigorous process for completion. And on average, it takes about 6 months for us to complete that process. And again, it is a partnership that we have developed with the States to make sure we provide transparency in that work.

We offer, at the very beginning, technical assistance to the States. State Wildlife Action Plans are due to make sure they get off on the right foot. They develop those plans, and those plans are then submitted to a regional review team that is comprised of neighboring States who know that habitat and conditions best in that region of the country, as well as the Fish and Wildlife Service for review. At that point they look at about eight critical factors to improve efficiency within that process to make sure that their SWAPs meet the needs of the plans. And then there is some back-and-forth to make sure everything is in place before they are finally approved by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you. I believe this is the third generation of SWAPs. Would you agree that these are mature, well documented, and thorough documents?

And shouldn't the review process be adopted to reflect that level of refinement?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, I appreciate the follow-up, and it is a mature process, and there are always changes. States want to focus and prioritize on new species or new habitats that work through the program.

Again, we have worked with a guidance memo with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to find those efficiencies, to make sure that we can move those through the process as efficient and effective as possible, while maintaining that transparency and collaboration with the States.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, sir.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Crank for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. CRANK. Thank you, Madam Chair, I appreciate that.

And thank you for being with us, Mr. Miko.

It is important that we empower State-led wildlife management, and we let science guide those practices. Colorado Parks and Wildlife, our State management agency, does a great job of following science-based management. Despite that, radical environmentalists weren't satisfied with the Colorado Wildlife Commission's 2016 decision not to support a wolf reintroduction

proposal. Instead, they funneled millions of dollars from out-of-State groups to fund ballot box biology and force a wolf reintroduction through the ballot. Now, in reality, the communities of Boulder and Denver imposed a $1 million problem on hard-working families on the Western Slope of Colorado.

Under the 10(j) final rule for the gray wolf in Colorado, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated Colorado Parks and Wildlife as the lead agency, and required an annual management report due by June 30 each year. Has Colorado Parks and Wildlife indicated to the Fish and Wildlife Service whether it will meet the June 30 deadline for the March 31, 2024 through April 1, 2025 reporting period?

Mr. MIKO. I appreciate the question, Congressman. I have not heard anything to the contrary to that, but we are happy to follow up with you.

Mr. CRANK. Great. If you would, I would appreciate that.

In 2023, Colorado Parks and Wildlife captured and relocated 10 wolves from Oregon only after Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana all refused to participate. And then, in 2025, Colorado captured and relocated 15 wolves from British Columbia. What role does the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service play in overseeing endangered species relocation across State lines versus international borders?

Mr. MIKO. I appreciate that follow-up, and the Fish and Wildlife Service does have a role to play both domestically and at our national borders in moving wildlife.

Admittedly, I am a fish biologist by training, and am not fully versed in ESA and some of those regulations. I am going to have to follow up with you in more detail, if that is desired.

Mr. CRANK. If you wouldn't mind doing that, I would appreciate that.

And I would tell you that this decision to get these wolves into Colorado from British Columbia was done right at the end of the Biden administration, and it almost appeared to be being done by the Governor of Colorado in a very rushed way to make sure that it was done before a certain date on January 20. So I would appreciate it if you would kind of take a look at that and see what role Fish and Wildlife may have played, and what we can do moving forward.

According to the final Record of Decision, the ESA does not prohibit the State of Colorado from partnering with other States to capture gray wolves in States where they are not listed under the ESA and transport those wolves to Colorado for release. I understand that the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a port exception permit allowing Colorado to import these wolves from British Columbia.

And my question is, this didn't require any environmental review or analysis by the Fish and Wildlife Service, is that correct?

Mr. MIKO. The Fish and Wildlife Service did issue a designated port exemption permit to Colorado Parks and Wildlife. And the permits are covered by a categorical exclusion under NEPA, and does not require further review.

Mr. CRANK. And that permit was issued under the Biden administration. Is that correct? Do you know?

Mr. MIKO. I don't know the answer to that.

Mr. CRANK. I believe that is correct, but OK, and then I have got just a little bit of time here.

As of June 2025, 5 of the 15 wolves imported from British Columbia have died. So that is a 67 percent survival rate. According to the State plan, a survival rate below 70 percent within 6 months should trigger a translocation protocol review. Has Colorado Parks and Wildlife consulted with Fish and Wildlife on initiating a protocol review?

Mr. MIKO. I appreciate the follow-up, and unfortunately, I am unfamiliar with those details and would have to follow back up with you.

Mr. CRANK. OK. And do you know if the Fish and Wildlife Service would consider this survival rate when deciding whether to issue another port exception permit to Colorado for additional translocated wolves?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, I am uncertain of what all is considered in designating of those exception permits.

Mr. CRANK. OK. If you wouldn't mind, if you could get back to us on some of those questions, I would greatly appreciate it. This is really important. It was forced on Colorado by ballot box biology, as I said at the outset. But we have a governor that is insistent on doing this and, in my view, sort of snuck around the Federal Government in a way, trying to get it at the last minute before President Trump took office. Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, and I now recognize the Ranking Member for 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you. I would like to yield my time to Ms. Elfreth.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Miko, I look forward to our one-on-one conversation, which I hope will happen very soon, about Federal employees. I do want to circle back to the confiscation challenge ahead of us. I think we can all agree that this is a public policy crisis that we are entering into in terms of wildlife that is being trafficked for various reasons.

I am curious. Perhaps you are not the one to ask, but I do believe hearings should be a back and forth, and we can have an honest conversation. I can learn things, as well, as you can hear our perspective. Do you think that the penalties currently in Federal law are in any way inhibiting this trafficking? Any perspective from your agency would be helpful.

Mr. MIKO. Yes, I appreciate the conversation on wildlife trafficking and we do see it, we are seeing an increase in wildlife trafficking, noticing that on our borders as we conduct those wildlife trafficking work with the law enforcement offices, we are finding other crimes, as well: human trafficking, drug trafficking, firearms trafficking. And we believe that, wildlife trafficking is seen by some of these drug cartels and international crime syndicates as a low-risk, high-reward, and as a way to fund their other illicit activities.

Ms. ELFRETH. Well, you hit the nail on the head, lowest risk, high reward. It is incredibly lucrative, just from the documentaries I have been watching and from my understanding from the AZA community, as well.

So, again, do you think the penalties are actually in any way providing a disincentive for people to participate in this trafficking?

Mr. MIKO. Yes, I appreciate it. I don't have the knowledge to judge whether the penalties are going to—deter or not deter.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK. I think this bill is a really critical piece of the puzzle in providing a backstop for the wildlife that is being trafficked, but I do think we need to engage in a conversation about current market value, how we are actually incentivizing people from participating in this trafficking.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I want to thank the witness, Mr. Miko, for the testimony today, and the members for their questions.

The members of the Committee may have some additional questions for the witness. And in fact, I think that they do, and have made that clear that we are seeking additional information from the Fish and Wildlife Service. And we appreciate your cooperation in that regard in responding to that follow-up, and we will ask that you respond to those requests in writing.

And while the clerk is resetting the table, I want to introduce the witnesses for our third panel. Mr. Miko, thank you for being here today.

Colonel Roger Young, the Executive Director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, from Tallahassee, Florida, is here with us today, as is Mr. Craig Hoover, the Executive Vice President of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums in Silver Spring, Maryland. Mr. Michael Shields, President of American Fishing Wire in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, has joined us. And Mrs. Candice Hasenyager, The Director of the Utah Division of Water Resources in Salt Lake City has traveled across the country to join us today.

Under Committee rules, you must limit your oral statements to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony, please press the button on the microphone and, as you heard earlier, we use timing lights. When you begin the light will turn green. When you have 1 minute remaining the light will turn yellow. And at the end of 5 minutes the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statements.

I will also allow all witnesses to testify before the members begin their questioning.

I now recognize Colonel Young for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ROGER YOUNG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION, TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Mr. YOUNG. Good morning. Thank you, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries.

Chair Hageman, my name is Roger Young, and I am the Executive Director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the FWC, which is the State agency that manages fish and wildlife resources for the citizens of Florida. Thank you for the invitation to testify about the importance of H.R. 1676, the

Making SWAPs Efficient Act, which Congressman Donalds and Congressman Moskowitz introduced. The FWC thanks to them for their bipartisan leadership on this important issue.

Also, I want to thank Congressmen Webster and Soto, who both serve on the House of Natural Resources Committee, for all their efforts on behalf of the State of Florida.

Florida is the third most populous State in the country, with 23 million residents and 143 million visitors to the State of Florida last year. Florida also has 12,133 square miles of water, 53,625 square miles of land, and 1,350 miles of coastline. Our beautiful State is home to some of the most diverse and unique wildlife in the world. It is an honor to lead an agency with more than 2,000 dedicated and passionate employees who are committed to improving wildlife conservation for this generation and for future generations to follow.

While Florida's wildlife management and wildlife management across this country is very complex, my testimony today will focus on H.R. 1676 and why it closes the gap for State fish and wildlife agencies in achieving their conservation missions.

This year 45 States will submit their State Wildlife Action Plan, often referred to as a SWAP, to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service after months of working with stakeholders and partners on revisions. This begins the official review process, where the SWAP is distributed to other States within the region for peer review with other State wildlife managers, where they analyze and evaluate the plan. Once their peers approve it, the plan is returned to the regional U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office for approval before finally being submitted to the Service headquarters for approval.

Ten years ago, when Florida submitted our State Wildlife Action Plan to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it was approved 18 months after it was submitted. In talking with other State fish and wildlife agencies, we found that we were not alone. In fact, for most States it took 18 months or longer—in one case up to 3 years for the Service to approve these SWAPs.

FWC wants to help to try to improve this process. In fact, we were part of a group that worked with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other State agencies to streamline the review process. We are confident that this process can be done in 6 months. Now, I am not here today to criticize the Federal Government. I am here to advocate for accountability on the part of the Federal Government which holds the States accountable for achieving the conservation actions outlined in our SWAP. I am here to promote H.R. 1676 because it solves a real problem for the States.

H.R. 1676 is a simple bill. It would establish a 6-month deadline for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to approve a State-prepared, peer-reviewed and approved State Wildlife Action Plan. If the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does not approve a State Wildlife Action Plan within 6 months, then it is deemed approved. This is a common sense solution to an existing problem for States.

This bill would bring certainty to an uncertain process and provide accountability for a process that the Service has said they are committed to undertaking. It would allow the States to move quicker to implement important conservation management strategies and tactics, and adjust current programs. That is why

FWC and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, AFWA, and other conservation groups all support H.R. 1676.

The FWC is here to be helpful. We appreciate the Committee's attention to this important bill, and encourage Committee approval. Thank you again for the invitation and the opportunity to be here today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Young follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROGER YOUNG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Good morning, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries. Chair Hageman, thank you for the invitation to testify about the importance of H.R. 1676, the "Making SWAPs Efficient Act," which U.S. Rep. Donalds (R–FL) and U.S. Rep. Moskowitz (D–FL) introduced on February 27, 2025. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) thanks them for their leadership on this important issue. Also, I want to thank U.S. Rep. Webster (R–FL) and U.S. Rep. Soto (D–FL), who both serve on the House Natural Resources Committee, for all their efforts on behalf of the state of Florida.

My name is Roger Young, and I am the executive director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, which is the state agency that manages fish and wildlife for the citizens of Florida. Florida is the third most populous state in the country, has 12,133 square miles of water, 53,625 square miles of land, and 1,350 miles of coast. Our beautiful state is home to some of the most diverse and unique wildlife in the world. It is an honor to lead an agency with 2,000 employees who are dedicated to improving wildlife conservation for this generation and future generations. While I can talk for hours about Florida's well-known and respected wildlife conservation management, today my testimony will focus on H.R. 1676 and why it closes a gap for state fish and wildlife agencies in achieving their conservation missions.

H.R. 1676 is a simple bill. It would place a six-month deadline on the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to approve a state-developed, peer-reviewed State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), and if the USFWS has not approved a submitted SWAP within six months, then the SWAP is deemed approved. I am not here today to criticize the actions of or impugn the motives of the USFWS. I am here to advocate for this bill and explain why it is needed and why it is supported by many organizations.

Prior to explaining why Congress should pass H.R. 1676, I need to start with a federal program called the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant (STWG) program. This program is funded annually by Congress, and the level of funding fluctuates from year to year. States, tribes, territories, and the federal district receive an annual grant that is based on state population and land mass. As a condition of receiving a grant under this program, states are required to submit a State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) where, working with constituents, other state agencies, and local governments, they identify Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), and the suite of factors that impact those species: their habitats and the threats they face as well as conservation actions and how to monitor for success. SGCN are species that need attention and conservation management to prevent them from being listed as Threatened or Endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which nobody wants. States and tribes use State and Tribal Wildlife Grants to implement conservation management for these Species of Greatest Conservation Need, guided by information in the SWAP. States submit a comprehensive plan revision every 10 years. When Florida's last SWAP was approved, 690 species were listed as being Species of Greatest Conservation Need in our great state. In the United States, 12,000 species were identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Once a state prepares a SWAP, as a part of the approval process, it is shared with state wildlife managers within its region who spend hours reviewing it, asking questions, and, ultimately, approving it. This peer review process is rigorous and is an important step in the overall process. While Florida's new plan will be submitted in 2026, it is my understanding that 45 states plan to submit their SWAP for federal approval in 2025. Currently, in the Southeast, there are 10 states that will be submitting their SWAPs by October of this year. The FWC is part of the Regional Review Team and is reviewing five of our southeastern states' SWAPs. We have allocated a total of 200 staff hours to complete this review in a 1-month timeframe.

Once the SWAP has been approved regionally, it is submitted to the USFWS in Washington, DC, to review and, then finally, to approve it.

Sounds like a simple process: state developed, peer reviewed, and then federally approved, right? Ten years ago, when Florida went through the process, it took 18 months. In our frequent collaborations and check-ins with other state agencies, we have found that we were not an anomaly. Other states reported 18 months, and with one state reporting it took three years for the federal government to approve its SWAP. To address this delay, our staff, along with staff from other state wildlife agencies, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and USFWS, worked to develop a streamlined process to prevent these long delays in approval. This delay is a problem for us and other states, and because we believe the federal government could do a better job, we have worked collaboratively to identify ways to improve the process and the state's role in it.

These delays in final approval could prevent critical implementation of conservation management for certain species. While it is easy to point fingers and assign blame, I do not want to do that. I want to solve the problem, and we believe H.R. 1676, which would set a six-month deadline for USFWS to approve a state-developed, peer-reviewed SWAP, is the solution. The streamlined review process we have collectively developed can be accomplished in 6 months, and although the USFWS has indicated they are committed to achieving this timeframe, there is currently no requirement for this. Deadlines are good. They provide accountability and certainty to states when they submit their State Wildlife Action Plans for approval. The USFWS holds states accountable within the SWAPs and the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program for achieving effective conservation, and we are requesting the same accountability of our federal partners in allowing states to move forward without unnecessary delays. That is why H.R. 1676 has the support of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, which is the trade association for state wildlife agencies, and other organizations.

Congress has taken steps in the past to address delays in the federal government approval process in our industry. A few years ago, after complaints from fishermen, fish processors, and states about the delay in approving federal fishery disasters, the Fishery Resource Disaster Improvement Act, which established deadlines for the federal government to make fishery disaster determinations, became law with unanimous and overwhelming support from Congress.

We believe H.R. 1676 can enjoy the same unanimous and overwhelming support from this Congress, and the FWC is ready to assist in advancing this much needed bill.

Thank you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Wonderful, thank you. I now recognize Mr. Hoover for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CRAIG HOOVER, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS, SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

Mr. HOOVER. Good afternoon, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Subcommittee members. It is a pleasure and an honor to testify before you in support of H.R. 3538, the Wildlife Confiscations Network Act. I am Craig Hoover, and I am the Executive Vice President of AZA, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

Wildlife trafficking is estimated to earn organized criminal networks up to $23 billion annually. The black market wreaks havoc on wildlife populations while financing criminal syndicates that threaten U.S. security interests and corrupt the rule of law. The illegal trade in live animals has created a domestic crisis for wildlife law enforcement at U.S. borders and major ports of entry across the Nation.

Across a recent 5-year period the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service saw 834 cases of live wildlife interdiction involving nearly 50,000 individual live animals, an average of nearly 30 per day each,

requiring placement and critical care. Qualified facilities with experts in animal well-being are often called upon to provide immediate medical care and housing for confiscated wildlife.

In October 2023 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and AZA launched a cooperative agreement to create the Wildlife Confiscations Network as a pilot program in Southern California. The network increases support for law enforcement by providing a single point of contact and a coordinated system to ensure the care and welfare of confiscated live wildlife. The network's confiscations coordinator connects agents with vetted, high-quality animal care facilities capable of identifying species, advising on safe handling and short-term holding, and providing housing for long-term care.

The network brings together zoos and aquariums, sanctuaries, rehabilitation centers, non-governmental organizations, and universities as key partners to provide quality care and management for confiscated wildlife. It allows us to move quickly, provides a large pool of animal care facilities to call upon, and offers opportunities to coordinate resource sharing so that no one facility is overwhelmed by a large number of confiscated animals. This collaborative approach reduces the burdens on law enforcement by relieving them of the heavy logistical challenges of finding placement.

The efficacy of this program is now well established. Since its inception, the Wildlife Confiscations Network has assisted in over 135 wildlife trafficking cases and successfully placed over 4,600 animals into long-term care. While this pilot program is a clear success, our current cooperative agreement is time limited, and the network lacks both the resources and direct congressional authority to expand beyond this Southern California region.

The Wildlife Confiscations Network Act would codify this thriving program, expand the established success of the network across the country, and authorize dedicated operational resources to support law enforcement nationwide. The network provides essential capacity to these officers, empowering them to focus their efforts on their true mandate: interdicting illegal live wildlife and holding criminals accountable.

The cases we support are shocking and heart-wrenching, but perhaps the best example of this insidious trade is the case of Baby Jay, a 5-month-old spider monkey who was tossed out of the window of a moving vehicle along the U.S.-Mexico border in southern Texas. Trapped in a suitcase and abandoned by the roadside, Baby Jay was discovered by Customs and Border Protection and subsequently seized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The network stepped in to facilitate Baby Jay's transportation to the Dallas Zoo for emergency care, and secured his eventual replacement for long-term care at Florida's Brevard Zoo, where he has been successfully integrated into their troupe of spider monkeys.

As this example illustrates, the Wildlife Confiscations Network Act is a non-partisan initiative that every American can support. It is a common-sense step forward to provide humane care to victimized wildlife, and provide critical support to law enforcement who strive every day to protect the American public from the dangers of transnational organized crime. With broad support from 75 stakeholder organizations and bipartisan support in Congress,

there is no question that the Wildlife Confiscations Network Act is in our national interest.

In closing, I wish to thank the Subcommittee for your swift consideration of this important legislation, and the co-Chairs of the Congressional Zoo and Aquarium Caucus, Mr. Garbarino, and Mr. Quigley for their leadership as the original co-sponsors of this bill. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hoover follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CRAIG HOOVER, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS

Good afternoon, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and subcommittee members. It is a pleasure and an honor to testify before you in support of H.R. 3538, the Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025. My name is Craig Hoover, and I am the Executive Vice President of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, also known as AZA.

Founded in 1924, AZA is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that our more than 250 accredited zoos, aquariums, and science centers reflect the global gold standard of excellence in animal care and wellbeing, conservation, education, science, and guest experience. Our members welcome more than 200 million visitors annually, including 55 million school-aged children, generating more than $22 billion in economic activity and supporting more than 198,000 jobs across the country.

At the heart of AZA are our mandatory accreditation standards, which involve an independent, objective process of self-evaluation, rigorous on-site inspection, and critical peer review of each and every AZA member facility, both current and prospective. Our standards are publicly available and continuously evolve and improve as we continue to learn more about the needs of the wildlife in our care. Once earned, AZA accreditation confers best-in-class status and assures that AZA is strictly comprised of only those institutions truly committed to meeting, and even exceeding, the global gold standard in wildlife care, an important message for local, state, and federal governments as well as the visiting public. All AZA members are required to undergo the accreditation process every five years, ensuring that AZA members continue to grow as standards improve.

Prior to joining AZA in 2019, I served as the Chief of the Division of International Conservation in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's International Affairs Program. During my time with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I was actively involved in the Service's efforts to implement the National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking, including strengthening controls on trade in elephant ivory, rhino horn, and other protected species and products. Earlier in my career, I served as the Service's Chief of the Division of Management Authority, responsible for implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). I also served as the Deputy Director of TRAFFIC North America, a joint wildlife trade monitoring program of World Wildlife Fund and International Union for the Conservation of Nature. I began my career on the front lines of the effort to combat wildlife trafficking, working as a Wildlife Inspector in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement, interdicting illegally traded live wildlife and wildlife products.

AZA and its members are leaders, partners, and participants in wildlife rescue and conservation. AZA works in concert with Congress, federal agencies, conservation organizations, state governments, the private sector, and the general public to conserve our wildlife heritage. AZA and its member facilities are proud to have long-standing partnerships with a number of federal agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

AZA's Wildlife Trafficking Alliance envisions a world where people work together to end the illegal wildlife trade—a global conservation crisis that is pushing thousands of species toward the brink of extinction. The Alliance is a coalition effort, comprised of over 100 private companies, nonprofit organizations, and AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums working closely with U.S. government agencies to combat wildlife trafficking. Wildlife trafficking is a transnational organized crime worth up to $23 billion annually that drives poaching, wreaking havoc on wild animal populations, while financing criminal syndicates and extremist groups that threaten U.S. security interests and corrupt the rule of law. Due to increasing demand for exotic pets and the ease with which these animals can be acquired via

the proliferation of online marketplaces, the trade in live animals has created a domestic crisis for wildlife law enforcement at U.S. borders and major ports of entry.

In a recent five-year period, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement intervened in 834 cases of live wildlife interdiction, involving 48,793 individual live animals—an average of nearly 30 per day—each requiring placement and care. These law enforcement officials know that when live wildlife is seized at U.S. ports of entry or exit, it is critical to provide the highest standard of care, as quickly as possible, both to ensure the survival of these animals and to maintain their value as evidence in ongoing criminal investigations. Qualified facilities with experts in animal wellbeing, including aquariums, zoos, sanctuaries, and rehabilitation centers, are often called upon first to provide immediate care, housing, and rehabilitation for confiscated wildlife. To better coordinate these efforts, AZA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service chose to shift from a siloed, ad-hoc—approach to a structured, collaborative partnership.

In October 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and AZA launched a cooperative agreement to create the Wildlife Confiscations Network. The Network is a first-of-its-kind program, currently operating as a pilot in Southern California, to increase support for law enforcement by providing a single point of contact and coordinated system to ensure the care and welfare of confiscated live wildlife. The Network's full-time wildlife confiscations coordinator assists federal wildlife law enforcement officers by connecting them with vetted, high-quality animal care facilities capable of assisting with species identification and providing basic safety and husbandry advice for short-term handling and holding, immediate triage needs, and long-term care and housing.

Due to an increasing number of confiscations, and the unique complexities involved in wildlife handling and triage, it is critically important to have an effective and efficient system providing care for these victims of illegal trade. In the face of increasing capacity demand, the structure of the Network allows us to move quickly, provides a larger pool of animal care facilities to call upon, and offers opportunities to coordinate "resource-sharing" in the event one facility does not have the capability to handle an entire caseload of animals from a single confiscation The Network has brought together zoos and aquariums, animal sanctuaries, animal rehabilitation centers, non-governmental organizations, and universities as key partners to provide quality care and management to confiscated wildlife. This collaborative approach benefits law enforcement by relieving them of the heavy logistical burden of finding placement and reduces the burdens on facilities located near major ports of entry that have historically received the majority of these calls. This allows law enforcement to focus on their core mission—stopping illegal wildlife trade.

The efficacy of this program is now established and proven. Since its inception less than two years ago, the pilot Wildlife Confiscations Network in Southern California has assisted in over 135 wildlife trafficking cases and successfully placed over 4,600 animals into quality care. While this program is a clear success in the region, it is inherently limited in both scope and duration due to its pilot design. While the mandate of our cooperative agreement is limited to Southern California, our coordinator is already taking calls from officers across the country and along the entirety of our southern border.

Currently, the Network lacks both the resources and direct congressional authority to expand beyond the Southern California region. Expanding the Network is essential to moving forward in our fight against the transnational organized criminal rings perpetrating the widespread illegal trade in wildlife. Many other regions in the U.S., especially along our borders, are facing a concurrent onslaught of wildlife trafficking and would greatly benefit from robust support from the Network.

The Wildlife Confiscations Network Act of 2025 would codify this thriving program, expand the established success of the Wildlife Confiscations Network across the country, and authorize the dedicated resources needed to support additional coordinators to reduce the burden on wildlife law enforcement nationwide. This bipartisan legislation will not only provide critical care to wildlife victims of the illegal trade but will, more importantly, provide an additional layer of security for both our law enforcement agents and the American public. The Network provides essential capacity to these officers, empowering them to focus their efforts on their true mandate, interdicting illegal live wildlife.

As wildlife professionals, we know that animals experience immense stress while being closely confined for illicit transport. Birds are routinely shoved into water bottles and toilet paper tubes, a substantial number suffocating in transit. Turtles are tightly wrapped in duct tape, stuffed into luggage or concealed on the body of a smuggler. Infant monkeys are tied up, their limbs tightly bound to their bodies,

dehydrated and malnourished. Along the trafficking routes around the world, these animals are often kept together in dank warehouses prior to being smuggled across borders, circumventing federal biosecurity protocols. By interdicting these animals and providing the immediate medical care and disease testing they need, we can minimize this risk and maximize our nation's biosecurity.

The cases we support are equally shocking and heart-wrenching. Hundreds of turtles stolen from their native habitats along the Eastern U.S.—wrapped tightly in tape, stressed and sick—discovered by a trained K9 officer at the point of export, bound for a Chinese market. Venomous snakes smuggled through the mail, stuffed into a Pringles can, posing a life-threatening risk to an unsuspecting U.S. Customs and Border Protection official who spots an unusual shape on an x-ray screen.

Perhaps the best example of this insidious trade is the spider monkey. Like Baby "J", a 5-month-old spider monkey who was tossed out of the window of a vehicle after someone was caught attempting to smuggle him across the U.S.-Mexico border in Southern Texas. Baby J, trapped in a suitcase and abandoned by the roadside, wasn't found until 18 hours later by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. He was subsequently seized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and was, unfortunately, unable to be returned to the wild. The Network facilitated Baby J's transportation to the Dallas Zoo for emergency care and his eventual placement at Florida's Brevard Zoo for long term care, where he has been successfully integrated into their troop of spider monkeys.

Baby J is the rare exception to a very cruel rule. Baby black-handed spider monkeys sell for up to $20,000 on the black market. Mexican spider monkeys in the pet trade, a relatively new yet accelerating trend, are known to be captured from the wild as infants. First, the mother is slaughtered, to make it easier for poachers to steal their young. Once captured, the infant monkeys make the traumatic journey to the border stuffed inside a bag or small cage, along with a variety of other poached animals bound for the pet trade—all battling dehydration, starvation, injury, and disease. Most die along the way. Those that survive to be smuggled across the border are bound for the hands of those lacking the knowledge and capacity to properly care for them. The Wildlife Confiscations Network Act will provide support to care for wild animals, like Baby J, and empower wildlife law enforcement to stem the tide of this scourge.

Overall, the Wildlife Confiscations Network has created an efficient, streamlined, and centralized system to identify care and placement for wildlife victims of illegal trade. Not only does this partnership increase the odds of survival for these vulnerable animals, it also concurrently preserves their legal chain-of-custody and evidentiary value to be used in the prosecution of criminal cases. The support provided by the Network frees law enforcement bandwidth to deeply investigate each individual wildlife trafficking case, supporting them in their work to move beyond the low-level smugglers and mules and to instead follow the evidence upstream to identify and prosecute the high-level leaders of these criminal organizations. The high-level traffickers, viewing wildlife crime as low-risk, high-reward, are known to also trade in other illicit goods, including narcotics and arms, and are even engaging in human trafficking. By interdicting cases of wildlife crime consistently and aggressively, federal agents can identify the patterns of crime convergence amidst these criminal networks and leverage such cases to dismantle global trafficking operations.

Federal agencies, and the broad community of wildlife professionals who partner to combat illegal wildlife trade, are well-versed in these dynamics. The Wildlife Confiscations Network Act has broad support from the stakeholder community, with 75 organizations endorsing the bill within a month of its introduction. These endorsements include zoos, aquariums, sanctuary partners, and others engaged in the Wildlife Confiscations Network pilot program.

We ask that the House Natural Resources Committee consider this legislation with the utmost urgency, recognizing the growing need for greater support for our law enforcement officers doing this critical work each day at every airport, seaport, and border crossing across the country.

At its core, the Wildlife Confiscations Network Act is a nonpartisan initiative that every American can support. It is a common-sense step forward to provide humane care to victimized wildlife, preserve the valuable biodiversity of smuggled threatened and endangered species, and provide critical support to our law enforcement who strive every day to protect the American public from the dangers of transnational organized crime. With broad support from the stakeholder community and bipartisan support in Congress, there should be no question that the Wildlife Confiscations Network Act is in the best interest of our national security.

In closing, on behalf of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, I wish to thank the House Natural Resources Committee staff who aided in the preparation of this

bill for introduction and the co-chairs of the Congressional Zoo and Aquarium Caucus, Mr. Garbarino and Mr. Quigley, for their leadership as the lead sponsors of this bill. Finally, I extend our immense gratitude to the Subcommittee for your swift consideration of this important legislation.

Thank you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Hoover. That was enlightening. Mr. Shields, please provide us with your 5 minutes of testimony.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL SHIELDS, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FISHING WIRE, COATESVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

Mr. SHIELDS. Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 3858. My name is Mike Shields, and I am the President of American Fishing Wire, based in Coatesville, Pennsylvania. It is a family business, and I am a second-generation owner and a proud member of the American Sport Fishing Association.

At American Fishing Wire we have been manufacturing sport fishing equipment for over four decades. We produce wire leaders, terminal tackle, and other products that help anglers connect with fish and with nature. I can say with confidence that our company and the sport fishing industry as a whole is deeply rooted in conservation. We know that without healthy fish populations and access to clean, fishable waters, our business doesn't exist. That is why we don't just support the Federal excise tax on sports fishing equipment; we are proud to pay it.

The Support Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund traces its roots back to the Dingell-Johnson Act of 1950 which created a dedicated source of Federal funding for fish conservation and recreational fishing programs by placing an excise tax on fishing equipment. These funds are dedicated to a wide range of boating safety, infrastructure, and aquatic resource projects. The program represents one of the most effective conservation funding mechanisms in the world, and is built on a strong partnership between anglers, boaters, manufacturers, and State and Federal wildlife agencies.

For every rod, reel, lure, spool of line, and many other categories of fishing equipment sold, a portion goes into the National Trust Fund, and then is distributed to the State fish and wildlife agencies to support aquatic habitat restoration, fish stocking, boating access improvements, public education programs, and more.

Since the program's inception, over $12 billion has been invested directly into fish and wildlife conservation. And these dollars don't just fund conservation, they also fuel economic growth. Recreational fishing is a $230 billion industry in the United States, and it supports over 1 million American jobs. For a manufacturer like American Fishing Wire, we see firsthand how investing in healthy fisheries pays dividends not just ecologically, but also economically.

A few months ago I had the privilege of participating in a Partner with a Payer event with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Organized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services

Office of Conservation Investment, these events are designed to connect companies like mine—those who pay into the excise tax program—with agencies who receive and implement those funds on the ground. It was a very powerful experience. We gave the agencies a tour of our factory and operations, and we discussed how we design and manufacture products that the anglers rely on.

In addition, we traveled to Huntsville Fish Hatchery in Pennsylvania, where I got to witness the restoration work funded in part by the taxes that we pay. We helped load trout onto the trucks and assisted stocking some of the local streams near our factory. It made the whole system feel tangible, and made me even more committed to supporting it.

Pennsylvania is a put-in, take-out fishery, and without the Sport Fish Restoration Fund there would be no fish for anglers. In an age where many question where their tax dollars go, this is one tax that has a clear accountability, measurable impact, and a broad public support. The return on investment isn't just measured in fish populations. It is seen in children learning to fish for the first time, in improved water quality, and expanded access for anglers of all backgrounds, and in vibrant local economies built around healthy aquatic ecosystems.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to Representatives Debbie Dingell and Rob Wittman for their leadership in introducing H.R. 3858. This bipartisan bill reauthorizes the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund and ensures that this critical source of conservation funding continues without interruption. Their commitment to conservation and to America's outdoor heritage is deeply appreciated by manufacturers like myself, by anglers, and by the outdoor recreation economy.

In closing, I want to reiterate the success of the Sport Fish Restoration Program rests on a rare alignment of industry, government, and public interest. It works because manufacturers like American Fishing Wire are willing to contribute. It works because State agencies are trusted stewards of those contributions, and it works because Congress continues to provide the legislative support necessary to keep this partnership strong.

On behalf of my company, my colleagues in the American Sport Fishing Association, and millions of anglers across the country, I urge you to support H.R. 3858 and ensure continued success in this essential program. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Shields follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TESTIMONY OF MIKE SHIELDS, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FISHING WIRE

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1676, H.R. 3538, H.R. 3857 & H.R. 3858

Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 3858, the Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025. My name is Mike Shields, and I am the President of American Fishing Wire, based in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, and a proud member of the American Sportfishing Association.

At American Fishing Wire, we've been manufacturing sportfishing equipment for over four decades. We produce wire leaders, terminal tackle, and other products that help anglers—from weekend hobbyists to professional guides—connect with fish and with nature. I can say with confidence that our company, and the sportfishing in-

dustry as a whole, is deeply rooted in conservation. We know that without healthy fish populations and access to clean, fishable waters, our business doesn't exist. That's why we don't just support the federal excise tax on sportfishing equipment, we're proud to pay it.

The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund traces its roots back to the Dingell-Johnson Act of 1950, which created a dedicated source of federal funding for fish conservation and recreational fishing programs by placing an excise tax on fishing equipment. It was modeled after the highly successful Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937 for wildlife restoration. Over time, the Sport Fish Restoration program has been expanded to include motorboat fuel taxes, small engine fuel taxes and import duties on boats and tackle. These funds are on dedicated to a wide range of boating safety, infrastructure, and aquatic resource projects. The program represents one of the most effective conservation funding mechanisms in the world and is built on a strong partnership between anglers, boaters, manufacturers, and state fish and wildlife agencies.

This excise tax, collected at the manufacturer level and administered through the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, is one of the greatest conservation success stories in American history. Along with its companion for wildlife restoration, this program represents a model that other industries and countries have looked to emulate: a user-pays, public-benefits system that connects those who use our natural resources with those who manage and conserve them.

For every rod, reel, lure, spool of line, and many other categories of fishing equipment sold, a portion goes into a national trust fund that is then distributed to state fish and wildlife agencies to support aquatic habitat restoration, fish stocking, boating access improvements, public education programs, and more. Since the program's inception, over $12 billion has been invested directly into fish and wildlife conservation, helping to recover fish populations, enhance angler access, and fund jobs in fisheries management and outdoor recreation.

And these dollars don't just fund conservation—they also fuel economic growth. Recreational fishing is a $230 billion industry in the U.S. and supports over one million American jobs. Every dollar invested through the Sport Fish Restoration program is multiplied many times over through increased participation, outdoor tourism, and retail sales. For a manufacturer like American Fishing Wire, we see firsthand how investing in healthy fisheries pays dividends—not just ecologically, but economically.

A few months ago, I had the privilege of participating in a "Partner with a Payer" event with the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission. Organized by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Office of Conservation Investment, these events are designed to connect companies like mine—those who pay into the excise tax system—with the agencies who receive and implement those funds on the ground. It was a powerful experience.

The day began at our American Fishing Wire facility in Coatesville, where we gave agency staff a tour of our operations and discussed how we design and manufacture products that anglers rely on. It was a valuable opportunity for the state to better understand the business side of the funding mechanism—and for us to better understand how our tax dollars are being used.

Later that day, we traveled to Huntsdale State Fish Hatchery, one of several hatcheries operated by the Commission. There, I got to witness the restoration work funded in part by the very taxes we pay—seeing fish being raised for stocking, learning about habitat enhancement projects, and observing education programs that inspire the next generation of anglers and conservationists. It made the whole system feel tangible, and made me even more committed to supporting it.

In an age where many question where their tax dollars go, this is one tax that has clear accountability, measurable impact, and broad public support. The return on investment isn't just measured in fish populations—it's seen in children learning to fish for the first time, in improved water quality, in expanded access for anglers of all backgrounds, and in vibrant local economies built around healthy aquatic ecosystems.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to Representatives Debbie Dingell and Rob Wittman for their leadership in introducing H.R. 3858. This bipartisan bill reauthorizes the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund and ensures that this critical source of conservation funding continues without interruption. Their commitment to conservation and to America's outdoor heritage is deeply appreciated by manufacturers like myself, by anglers, and by the broader outdoor recreation economy.

H.R. 3858 reflects the priorities and consensus of the Angling and Boating Alliance (ABA), a coalition of organizations representing the recreational fishing and boating industries, conservation groups, and state fish and wildlife agencies. This

group works collaboratively to ensure that the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund continues to meet the evolving needs of the communities and ecosystems it supports. As a manufacturer and a member of the American Sportfishing Association—one of the founding members of the ABA—I am pleased to see this bill incorporate the ABA's thoughtful, consensus-based recommendations.

H.R. 3858 includes several targeted improvements that will strengthen and modernize the program:

- Extends the Trust Fund's authorization through 2031, providing certainty and continuity for conservation and boating safety programs that rely on it.
- Updates the way interstate fisheries commissions are funded, moving from a flat appropriation to a percentage-based allocation that will allow their annual apportionments to grow as trust fund receipts (presumably) increase over time. This adjustment will provide a small but meaningful increase in funding to support regional coordination, habitat restoration, and data collection.
- Promotes expanded access to domestic fuel options for boaters by allowing infrastructure grant applicants under the Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) program to receive priority consideration if they provide alternative marine fuels. This is a forward-looking, no-cost update that supports energy flexibility for recreational boating.
- Addresses a long-standing fairness issue for bait bucket manufacturers by reducing the excise tax on integrated aerated bait buckets from 10% to 3%. This levels the playing field with bucket and aerator components sold separately, while having a negligible financial impact on the Trust Fund.

Each of these updates is smart, responsible, and preserves the core mission of the Sport Fish Restoration program: to reinvest user-generated funding back into the resources, infrastructure, and access that sustain our fisheries and our industry.

While H.R. 3858 includes recommendations from the Angling and Boating Alliance, it does not currently include provisions from a related bill—the Sporting Goods Excise Tax Modernization Act (H.R. 1494). This legislation is strongly supported by the Alliance and would address a gap in the administration of the excise tax system that funds the Trust Fund. Online sales of fishing equipment from foreign manufacturers to U.S. consumers typically bypass collection of the excise tax, resulting in lost conservation funding and creating a competitive disadvantage for tax-paying companies. The ABA is hopeful H.R. 1494 will move as a standalone bill before reauthorization of the Trust Fund is finalized. However, if progress on H.R. 1494 stalls, the ABA would welcome the opportunity to work with the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee to explore incorporating its provisions into this reauthorization. Clarifying and updating the excise tax system will improve efficiency, strengthen compliance, and ensure that all applicable products are appropriately contributing to conservation.

In closing, I want to reiterate: the success of the Sport Fish Restoration program rests on a rare alignment of industry, government, and public interest. It works because manufacturers like American Fishing Wire are willing to contribute. It works because state agencies are trusted stewards of those contributions. And it works because Congress continues to provide the legislative support necessary to keep this partnership strong.

On behalf of my company, my colleagues in the American Sportfishing Association, and millions of anglers across the country, I urge you to support H.R. 3858 and ensure the continued success of this essential program.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Shields. I now recognize Ms. Hasenyager for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CANDICE HASENYAGER, DIRECTOR, UTAH DIVISION OF WATER RESOURCES, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

Ms. HASENYAGER. Good morning, Chairman Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle and members of the Subcommittee. I am Candice Hasenyager, and I am the Director at the Utah Division of Water Resources. I am a native Utahn and engineer. I have been

at Water Resources for about 18 years, and the last 3 years as Director.

In Utah we always say you can't manage what you don't measure, so I really appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on the benefits of H.R. 3857, Snow Water Supply Forecasting Reauthorization Act of 2025, and commend Congressman Hurd and Congressman Neguse for introducing this critical piece of legislation.

Utah's water supply, like much of the West, is based on a snow-driven hydrology. Approximately 95 percent of our water supply comes from our snowpack. The snow falls in the mountains throughout the winter, and the spring conditions start to melt the snow. Our rivers will swell and fill the reservoirs that were designed to capture the run-off for later use.

While this general process occurs every year, it is highly and increasingly variable in terms of snow accumulation and the volume and timing of run-off. Accurate and timely snowpack data are essential for forecasting water supplies that support our communities, agriculture, and our ecosystems. Utah continues to grapple with significant water challenges primarily driven by ongoing drought conditions, greater extremes in our water supply, and a growing population.

In 2022 Utah experienced some of the worst water supply conditions of our lifetimes. Great Salt Lake reached record lows at the same time as the Colorado River was facing unprecedented challenges. These challenges are not only felt at the larger interstate scale, but also in Utah's local communities where water availability is a persistent challenge and shortages are routine. Utah is working diligently to find solutions that enhance the management of our watersheds and ensure a sustainable future for the region. While we have had a couple of good snow years, we know that the State is still in drought. In Utah we are either in drought or we are preparing for the next one.

H.R. 3857 would reauthorize the Bureau of Reclamation's Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program. This program provides critical funding to deploy and integrate new snow monitoring technologies helping to make our water management decisions more robust in the face of weather extremes, wildfires, and other challenges. For example, the program supports the use of NASA-developed airborne snow observatories, or ASO technology, to measure the snowpack across the entire watershed, providing a high-resolution snowpack inventory. Utah has utilized this program for two pilot projects, and they have deployed ASO technology over key watersheds. These projects, located in the Colorado River basin and the Great Salt Lake basin, are producing accurate and detailed maps of key snow characteristics.

And it is important to note that ASO complements the essential Natural Resource Conservation Service snow telemetry sites, also called snowtel, and emerges as a powerful and important tool in the snow measurement toolbox. These airborne surveys have provided a comprehensive picture of the snowpack, including low elevation and smaller tributary areas, which enables local water managers to fine-tune their operations, make existing

infrastructure more efficient, which in turn makes us all a little bit more fiscally responsible.

Our Utah projects have benefited from other Western ASO projects in California and Colorado. They have both utilized the program, and have seen dramatic benefits from the improved measurement and forecasting tools, which reduces uncertainty and enhances run-off for all parties. Federal support for this program has been integral in enabling part of this effort. Reauthorization of the Bureau's program will help address an urgent need while drawing lessons learned during the program's initial term.

Thank you for your time this morning, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Hasenyager follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CANDICE HASENYAGER, DIRECTOR OF THE UTAH DIVISION OF WATER RESOURCES

H.R. 3857, the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Reauthorization Act of 2025

Good morning, Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Candice Hasenyager, and I am the Director of the Utah Division of Water Resources. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on the benefits of H.R. 3857, the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Reauthorization Act of 2025, and commend Congressman Hurd and Congressman Neguse for introducing this critical piece of legislation.

The Utah Division of Water Resources plays a central role in planning, developing, and managing the state's water resources to support long-term water reliability for Utah's growing population, agricultural needs, and natural ecosystems. As the state's water planning agency, it conducts comprehensive studies, administers conservation programs, and supports infrastructure development to optimize water use and storage. The Division also coordinates with federal, tribal, and local partners on drought resilience, water forecasting, and watershed protection. Its efforts ensure that Utah can proactively address future water challenges in the face of rapid growth and increasingly variable and extreme weather conditions.

Utah's water supply, like much of the western United States, is based on a snow-driven hydrology. Approximately 95% of our water supply comes from our snowpack. As the snow falls in the mountains, it builds throughout the winter. We know that spring brings warm weather, and the snow will start to melt. Our rivers will swell and fill the reservoirs designed to capture the spring runoff for later use. While this general process occurs every year, it is highly and increasingly variable in terms of snow accumulation and the volume and timing of runoff. Accurate and timely snowpack data are essential for forecasting water supplies that support agriculture, communities, and ecosystems.

Utah continues to grapple with significant water challenges, primarily driven by ongoing drought conditions and greater extremes in our water supply. In 2022, Utah experienced some of the worst water supply conditions in our lifetimes. Great Salt Lake reached record lows at that time. Great Salt Lake is Salt Lake City's namesake, contributes significantly to Utah's economy, supports the highest concentration of Utah's valuable wetlands and provides a stopover for 10 million birds annually to rest and refuel during migration each year. The lake also contributes to lake effect snow by approximately 5–10%. The declining levels of Great Salt Lake are a stark indicator of overall water stress, influenced by both reduced inflows due to diversions for municipal and agricultural use and increased demand and evaporation from rising temperatures.

In addition, Utah is a Colorado River Basin state and relies on this essential water source, which serves seven states, 40 million people, two countries and 29 tribes. For over 20 years, the river has been strained by prolonged drought, resulting in decreased reservoir volumes and increased water shortages. In recent years (2023 and 2022), Lakes Powell and Mead, the two reservoirs representing the bulk of storage on the Colorado River, reached record lows. Decreased reservoir volumes reduce power generation and cause significant uncertainty in water management. These circumstances have resulted in negative economic and environmental impacts. These challenges are not only felt at the larger interstate scale but also in Utah's local communities, where water availability is a persistent challenge and

shortages are routine. Utah is working diligently to find solutions that enhance the management of the Colorado River and ensure a sustainable future for the region.

While recent good snow years have provided some relief, the state is still experiencing drought conditions across most of the state, particularly in southern Utah, where snowpack levels and soil moisture are critically low. In Utah, we are either in drought or preparing for the next one.

In our state, comprehensive snow monitoring and water supply management rely heavily on the combined efforts of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Snow Survey Program through their snowpack telemetry sites (SNOTEL), and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) stream gauge network that continuously tracks streamflow.

Snow Water Supply Forecasting Reauthorization Act of 2025

H.R. 3857 would reauthorize the Bureau of Reclamation's Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program (SNOFO). The SNOFO program provides critical funding to deploy and integrate novel snow-monitoring technologies, helping to make our water management decision-making more robust in the face of weather extremes, wildfires, and other challenges. For example, the program supports the use of NASA-developed Airborne Snow Observatories (ASO) technology to measure the snowpack everywhere, providing a full-watershed snowpack inventory at high resolution, which yields highly accurate water volume measurements of this crucial snowpack reservoir. This new measurement tool has been deployed via two pilot projects in Utah, aiding state, local, and regional partners in their efforts to improve runoff forecasting, add essential early warnings of drought and flood conditions, and optimize water resource management and use.

In one of the Utah projects, the Colorado River Authority of Utah partnered with Utah Division of Water Resources, the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, and Airborne Snow Observatories, Inc. to deploy ASO technology over key watersheds—the Uinta and Wasatch ranges—and produce accurate detailed maps of key snow characteristics (depth, albedo and water-equivalent measurements). Building upon the established NRCS SNOTEL snow measurements, the ASO technology emerges as a powerful and important tool in the snow measurement toolbox. These airborne surveys complement traditional SNOTEL stations, providing full basin coverage that includes low-elevation and smaller tributary areas often overlooked in ground-based monitoring. This comprehensive picture of the snowpack enables local water managers to fine-tune their operations, making more efficient use of existing infrastructure. While this effort is focused on Utah specific tributaries, these improved forecasts and operations have the potential to benefit all stakeholders on the Colorado River.

The second Utah project, new this year, in the Weber River Basin, utilizes ASO technology in a similar approach to reduce forecast uncertainty and optimize local water management. The goal is to determine if we can improve the runoff forecast to increase flows into the Great Salt Lake. The innovative solutions, such as those enabled by the SNOFO program, are crucial to achieving the parallel goals of ensuring a stable water supply for agricultural producers and cities, while maintaining the Great Salt Lake's essential stability and its vital role in Utah's economy, environment, and history. In Utah, we always say, "You can't manage what you don't measure."

The Utah projects are emblematic of and indeed have benefited from the pathfinding of other ASO and SNOFO projects around the western United States. Programs in California and Colorado have both utilized this program and have seen dramatic benefits from the improved measurement and forecasting tool, which reduces uncertainty and enhances runoff for all parties.

These innovative data and forecasting resources enabled by collaborative participation leverage funding at all levels. Federal support via the SNOFO program has been an integral and enabling part of this effort. Reauthorization of this program will help meet an urgent need while drawing from the lessons learned during the program's initial term. The minor changes made to the SNOFO program by H.R. 3857 intends to ensure that the program can meet the needs of water managers who frequently deal with hydrologic extremes—whether that is water surplus or scarcity—through increased deployment of these technologies.

While I appreciate the challenging fiscal climate, we find ourselves in, the SNOFO program is a vital tool in western water management, enabling more accurate forecasting, planning, and decision-making. Interest in the program has greatly exceeded available funds in recent years, demonstrating both its operational value and the growing demand for Airborne Snow Observatory technology. Reauthorization of the program at a level that reflects demonstrated stakeholder need is critical

to continuing its benefits for water supply reliability, flood control, and ecosystem management.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you for that interesting testimony. I want to thank each of the witnesses for coming today and providing this valuable information. I will now recognize members for 5 minutes each of questioning, and I am going to begin with myself.

Colonel Young, in your testimony you mentioned that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have together developed a streamlined review process for SWAPs. Can you describe how that process is envisioned to work, and how Mr. Donalds's bill supplements that process?

Mr. YOUNG. Thank you, Madam Chair. Great question.

So yes, the States' agencies, the Federal agencies, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, with assistance with AFWA and other conservation entities, all work together and are focusing on how we can make this as efficient as possible. And what we have developed is a SWAP summary template.

Mr. YOUNG. And what this is is, as these plans are developed in the regional review phase, which often takes many months, up to 42 months at some times, these are providing a review roadmap for that next level of review. So it highlights the eight elements of the SWAPs that are required for passing. So this facilitates the speed and ease of review at that next level.

Congressman Donalds's bill will just simply help us be more efficient and effective in getting that, and this roadmap and that template that we have provided will help us get there.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK, thank you.

Mr. Hoover, you may have heard the questioning that I had for the gentleman from the Fish and Wildlife Service, and what I am trying to find out is how many organizations meet the definition of H.R. 3538 for a cooperative program with the Secretary for the care and well-being of these animals. I am trying to find out how many organizations actually meet the definition in the bill.

Mr. HOOVER. Thank you, Chairwoman. I think the best way to look to the future with regard to potential implementation of this law is to look to the present. And what I would point out is that the current pilot project, which aligns very closely with the legislative language, currently involves zoos, aquariums, sanctuaries, universities, wildlife rehabilitation facilities, and other similar organizations.

More than a third of the current approximately 40 partners in that effort are not accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Some of them are accredited by other organizations such as the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries; others are not accredited at all. So I do think the legislation really requires a big tent, because it is a very big problem. And frankly, we would welcome any facility that has the capacity to care for confiscated wildlife and the interest to do—in doing so to join in that effort.

Ms. HAGEMAN. And that is really what I am trying to get to. Would you agree that the Service could accomplish these goals

perhaps more efficiently and more effectively by partnering with multiple organizations, rather than just a few?

Mr. HOOVER. I think the legislation affords that opportunity. Like I said, it describes an oversight entity, but in terms of the participating organizations it is quite broad.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK.

Mr. HOOVER. And as I said, current practice reflects that.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK.

Mr. HOOVER. Thank you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Ms. Hasenyager, in your testimony you state that in Utah we are either in drought or preparing for the next one. In Wyoming we have the exact same situation, so I understand exactly what you are talking about. Can you tell us how this program and the emerging technologies identified in the 2021 report to Congress would sharpen our abilities to monitor and predict annual water conditions using snow pack information?

Ms. HASENYAGER. Thank you, Chairman. Yes. What it does is it really helps us to reduce uncertainty in our overall snow water supply. Because we are able to get a whole basin perspective. And then, once we can estimate that volume, then we will have more certainty in our forecast, as well, more accurate forecasts.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, wonderful. While this program is administered by the Bureau of Reclamation, much of your testimony describes how the Utah Division of Water Resources has benefited from increased opportunities for snow mapping by airborne surveys. How has this program benefited not only Federal water management, but also State, tribal, and local management?

Ms. HASENYAGER. Thank you, Chairman, Water is essential to life for all of us and for all parts of our economy. So all water users benefit from a more accurate forecast. And also having lead-in to if we are going to have a big year or a small year as far as runoff goes, and it helps us better prepare for what may come.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, wonderful, and thank you for the work that you do in Utah. I know how important this information is for not only our reservoir operators, but for everyone in the State to know what kind of a year that we are going to have in relation to snowpack.

The Chair now recognizes Representative Elfreth for her 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the panel for being here.

Mr. Hoover, thank you. If you could share with the various AZA organizations that have already taken part in the pilot program the gratitude from myself—and I am sure I can speak for the whole Committee—the public good that you are providing free of charge, I greatly appreciate.

First of all, it is my understanding that wildlife trafficking is certainly on the rise. The trend is going up. Is that correct?

Mr. HOOVER. Yes, that is correct.

Ms. ELFRETH. OK. And if we were not to move this bill, can you give us an appreciation for what would happen to the majority of those trafficked animals who were confiscated?

Mr. HOOVER. Thank you, Congresswoman.

So if we don't have the capacity to care for live, confiscated wildlife, wildlife law enforcement is faced with, really, a series of several bad options. They won't have access to qualified care. We are really pushing the envelope with our own capacity at this moment to provide that care, and those bad options include allowing the illegal trade to occur, euthanasia—so the individual animals are killed—returning the animals to the country of export and attempting to care for the animals themselves. Again, all bad options. Each of these options undermines their efforts to combat wildlife trafficking and negatively impacts the well-being of the individual animals involved.

And the most likely of these options, really, is returning the animals to the country of export, where you could imagine what will happen next. And that is many will not survive the additional transport, and the likelihood is that those that do survive will be just entered right back into illegal trade, and this cycle will continue.

Ms. ELFRETH. Thank you for that. And in your experience, what is the process for finding placements for confiscated animals?

And who is currently bearing the burden of coordinating those placements?

Mr. HOOVER. The history, and I can speak to this because I actually started in wildlife law enforcement at the beginning of my career, is that individual law enforcement officials have their own personal lists of who they call, which means there is no coordinated effort. Some facilities bear most of the burden, particularly those that are closest to major ports of entry or the border, and there is just this overwhelm.

An excellent example of that is the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville, Texas, which is currently caring for 17 confiscated spider monkeys at tremendous individual cost to that facility. We need a network so that we can spread the resources around so that no individual facility is overwhelmed, and so that we can help law enforcement get back to doing what they need to be doing, and that is stopping wildlife traffickers.

Ms. ELFRETH. And I have a great appreciation, having worked at the National Aquarium. You have the informal network through AZA right now, but I think this bill presents the opportunity for the Federal Government to step up in its own role in helping coordinate that network, as well, and the facilitation of placements.

And then last question, Mr. Hoover. I know doing this public service is of financial burden to your membership. Can you speak a little to the Committee about what the resources look like that you are putting into this network?

Mr. HOOVER. Yes, thank you for that question. Perhaps the best way to speak to that is to talk about a few individual cases.

This is not a situation where there is reimbursement for this activity. It is work that we do because we are passionate about wildlife. We are passionate about wildlife conservation, and we are passionate about taking care of individual animals that are at risk. And the cost of providing emergency care and lifetime care are enormous.

Just two examples. One of our partners in California is currently caring for a tiger cub seized at the U.S.-Mexico border. Lifetime care for that animal is estimated to be about $1.2 million.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Oh, my gosh.

Mr. HOOVER. The lifetime care of a single black-handed spider monkey, which can live for 30 years, is estimated to be approximately $1.1 million.

These are costs that our members and our partners take on because we believe it is the right thing to do, but it is not sustainable. And so the Wildlife Confiscations Network Act would help support the important work on behalf of our government partners. Thank you.

Ms. ELFRETH. I really appreciate that context. And again, I want to thank your members. The public good you are performing, you are educational conservation organizations, and you are also providing this really essential public good for the rest of the nation. We appreciate it, and that is why I am a proud supporter of this bill.

And I will yield back my time, Madam Chair. Thank you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Ezell for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

My district, which is on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, we live and breathe recreational fishing. In a time where almost all of America's seafood is being imported, we must defend our domestic supply. H.R. 3858, the Sport Fish Restoration, Recreational Boating Safety, and Wildlife Restoration Act of 2025—that is a mouthful—reauthorizes the original Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund through 2031, and increases funding based on inflation, which helps account for the burden that is placed on the American fishermen. These funds would tackle issues such as invasive aquatic species, habitat restoration, helping fishers throughout the United States have sufficient access to domestic supply, and helping to offset the burden placed on them because of imported seafood.

Mr. Shields, can you describe the projects these funds have impact along the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

Mr. SHIELDS. Thank you, Congressman. I apologize respectfully, but I am more knowledgeable in the funding that goes into fisheries management and to conservation resources, and less knowledgeable specifically about that question. I would be happy to research that and get you an answer, working closely with my colleagues at the American Sport Fishing Association.

Mr. EZELL. Would you like to expand on it to some of the other areas that you are familiar with?

Mr. SHIELDS. Sure, yes. We all know that, healthy fisheries and public access, don't just happen. They require significant funding and resources. And, if we aren't going to do it as an industry, then it is just not going to happen on its own. So I think it is really important that this bill serves a very important service.

And there is also a business a business benefit to it because there is a strong return on the investment and everybody that contributes towards it.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you. How have the various marine fisheries commissions benefited sportsmen and women across the country?

And can you describe the way these commissions assist both commercial fishing interests and recreational anglers?

Mr. SHIELDS. Sure. What it does primarily is that it promotes, healthy fisheries, and it increases fishing habitats. So without fish, we don't have a market or an industry for those people to make a living.

Mr. EZELL. Right.

Mr. SHIELDS. So it directly impacts them in that way.

Mr. EZELL. What message would you like to convey to the Members of Congress about the urgency of passing this legislation?

Mr. SHIELDS. I would like to just point out the significance of this bill. It really isn't so much of a tax. I view it more as a conservation trust. The money is collected and goes back into the industry, and it is a sustainable initiative, and it helps to grow the business and preserve the best interests of everybody involved.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Wonderful. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Magaziner for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Thank you to the Chair and Ranking Member and to all of our expert witnesses for being here today.

I come from Rhode Island, where recreational fishing, in addition to commercial, is a major driver of our economy. Rhode Islanders and our guests can catch striped bass, black sea bass, blackfish, flounder, even tuna off the coast of Rhode Island, over 50,000 Rhode Islanders have recreational fishing licenses. The recreational fishing industry generates nearly half a billion dollars of economic activity in our State, and last year we welcomed millions of people to our State for over four million individual fishing trips in Rhode Island.

What I hear from the recreational fishing industry in our State is that Dingell-Johnson is invaluable in investing millions of dollars a year in Rhode Island for habitat restoration, research, outreach, and assorted industry support, maintaining hundreds of fishing spots across the State, coastal restoration work to improve recreational access and protect against erosion, programs to help train kids and seniors and others on how to fish responsibly. So I am proud to support Representative Dingell's work to reauthorize this program, and I thank her for her long-time leadership on sportsmen's issues and habitat conservation.

But while we support the reauthorization of this bill, we also have to ensure that U.S. Fish and Wildlife has the staffing and resources needed to support the recreational fishing industry, and that is something that I am concerned about in light of the purging of Federal employees at U.S. Fish and Wildlife, among other agencies.

In addition, we have before us a bill today on Pittman-Robertson funding. This invests funds in sportsmen who hunt whitetail deer, small game, and waterfowl in my State for land acquisition, habitat restoration, and hunters' education. This bill would require Fish and Wildlife to approve State plans to use these funds within 180 days.

I agree that we need to cut down on administrative delays. But again, we have to make sure that Fish and Wildlife has the staff that it needs to actually review these plans and do the work. Setting artificial deadlines without making sure that the staffing is in place to deliver on those deadlines is a self-defeating exercise. So I will ask all of our witnesses, and perhaps we can start with Colonel Young.

Both Dingell-Johnson and Pittman-Robertson grants are administered by U.S. Fish and Wildlife. Since the start of this year, Fish and Wildlife has seen hundreds of employees fired or given these accelerated retirement options, and freezes have been placed on Federal grants. Does this kind of disruption at Fish and Wildlife make State-level habitat restoration work easier or harder?

Mr. YOUNG. Thank you for your question. It is definitely an appropriate one for the time.

Conservation doesn't happen without partnerships across the board, across the country, especially dealing with the funds that go into supporting it. And this is why we feel that the Donalds bill, 1676, will make that more efficient. That is why we worked with our regional partners from the Service to help come up with that template and that road map to help facilitate things when it comes to approving the State Wildlife Action Plan. Because we all know it is more cost effective to try to identify species of greatest concern, whichever that is, and try to do preventative measures beforehand. It is more cost effective to do that than to try to recover a species after it has gone too far.

So taking these initiatives and conservation measures up front, working with our partners early on will help get that done.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Well, I appreciate that collaborative approach, and I hope that those Fish and Wildlife regional staff members who you worked with and have been working with will be able to keep their jobs with the carnage that we are seeing in our Federal agencies.

And just to be clear, it is not just what has already occurred, but in the President's budget for next year he is proposing a 32 percent cut to the Fish and Wildlife Service. That is more than half $1 billion, including a 31 percent cut from the Fish and Aquatic Conservation Program and a 22 percent cut from the National Wildlife Refuges, among many others.

So I will give someone else a chance in the few seconds that I have left, perhaps, Mr. Shields. What will the impact be of these sorts of cuts if they are allowed to go through?

Mr. SHIELDS. I don't really know the full impact. Obviously, it will have an impact. But there is decades of work that has been done in these programs, and it is concerning that some of that work could be lost. But I don't really have a specific answer for you. I am sorry.

Mr. MAGAZINER. Yes. Thank you.

I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Mr. LaMalfa for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Hasenyager, I appreciate your testimony and your presence, and the interest in applying better technology on our snow forecast,

run-off forecasts, et cetera. It is a big deal in California, where I am from, as well. And I have had a lot of frustration over that in the last several years, say from 2020 to 2022 and even more currently. We have had an amazing amount of snowpack and rain, in the last 3 years. Yet the allocation of water supply most specifically to agriculture, seems to wane. We have full lakes, and some areas of the State at best are receiving 50 or 55 percent of what used to be their normal allocation in agriculture. It seems to be that they are trying to make that the new normal, 100 equals 50 or 55, whether you are talking the State project or the Federal project there.

So just a few years ago they had over-estimated the snowpack amount and released water subsequently to tailor that since they have to maintain flood control levels in the lakes per Army Corps of Engineers, and then, made other commitments. And the end of the day, oops, we over-estimated, so now people ran short. And it is agriculture that always gets hit first.

So can you provide any additional insight on how SnoFo and these technologies would be helpful to apply back home in California?

This year Lake Oroville, which I can just see out my front window, did reach fullness within, eight inches of what they call the top. Lake Shasta, farther north in my district, got within just a few feet, If I remember off the top of my head, another 150,000 acre-feet, I think, would have filled it. But even then, the water managers are nervous about letting the lakes fill all the way. In my view, with some level of humor, I would like to see every lake be an infinity pool, because that means you have saved every drop of water you can, because there is someone somewhere that is going to need it.

But they are concerned that we have got to leave that space there in case a storm comes along in May or June, which they don't, and makes all the snowpack melt too fast and they have to let too much water out.

So could you comment on how this technology would be additionally helpful in California on our big lakes there?

And does that touch in any way the FIRO technology which is forecast-informed? Is that something you are parallel with?

Ms. HASENYAGER. Thank you, Congressman. I like the idea of an infinity pool. That sounds pretty nice.

By implementing these programs and this ASO technology, we are able to get the basin scale amount of snow, so the whole volume. And this information can inform and optimize our flood control operations, so better inform how much water is coming in so we know how much to release at our Federal facilities, provide short and long-term water management decisions. It helps us with environmental protection, drought mitigation, and resiliency, and really, the dissemination of results that really benefit our water users by knowing what to plan for and help us get to better decision-making more quickly.

So I think there is a lot of promise for this technology to be implemented more widespread.

Mr. LAMALFA. Yes, I was frustrated this year that Lake Shasta, for example, they were releasing about 62,000 CFS, those numbers

might be a completely different world compared to on the Colorado River and the size of the projects you have there with Lake Mead and Lake Powell. But that is a lot of water to be letting down the stream based on, some level of fear of the snowpacks coming down all of a sudden into the lake. But it was actually flooding out roadways in one of my counties and such.

I guess I am a complainer, but until the lake is completely full, it means it is missed opportunity. And with these ways to forecast, whether it is FIRO, Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations is what FIRO is. And what you are talking about with being able to better estimate snowpack, we could be saving more water.

And you have had tough conditions on the Colorado there. I don't know when the last time Lake Mead was actually full or Lake Powell was actually full, and I am rooting for you every day, on that. Has it been helpful to have water not wasted from releases on the Colorado?

Ms. HASENYAGER. Yes, Congressman. By having this improved forecast, we are seeing better information as far as health and human safety when we are talking about flood control at reservoirs, as well as being able to inform our conservation programs.

The programs in Utah are fairly new, but we are seeing good data come out of them.

Mr. LAMALFA. Yes, OK. Well, I have to yield back here, but do you recommend we in California take a strong look and perhaps implement these to the full degree we could be?

Ms. HASENYAGER. Yes, that is what we are looking for in Utah, too.

Mr. LAMALFA. Yes, OK. Thank you.

Madam Chairman, I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. And the Chair now recognizes Ms. Rivas for 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. RIVAS. Thank you, Madam Chair, for recognizing me. My questions will be for Mr. Miko, and I plan on submitting my questions for the record after this hearing.

The Honorable Luz Rivas did not submit questions to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Ms. RIVAS. The Trump administration is proposing a 32 percent cut to the Department of the Interior, which equates to $539 million worth of cuts to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This includes a $38.9 million cut to the Fish and Wildlife Service's ecological services, which implements the Endangered Species Act; a $3.2 million cut to carry out the Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Coastal Programs, which foster on-the-ground collaborations to restore, protect, and enhance habitats for Federal priority trust species; $115.8 million cut to the National Wildlife Refuge System; $34.7 million cut to conservation and enforcement efforts that support law enforcement officers who investigate wildlife trafficking; zeroing out specific programs such as the National Wildlife Refuge Fund, Cooperative Endangered Species Fund, and State and Tribal Wildlife Grants.

Zeroing out the State and tribal wildlife grants will have a devastating impact to my constituents in California. California uses the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant to develop and implement

its State Wildlife Action Plan. My home State annually receives two and three million a year from the State Wildlife Grant fund to help identify wildlife in need of conservation and prescribe actions to conserve these species. California has more species than any other State, and the largest number of species that are found nowhere else in the world. We have 1,045 unique species of animals and 6,500 species of plants. This State Wildlife Grant Fund makes sure that millions of Californians and our visitors can enjoy our State's beautiful and diverse natural environments. More importantly, it ensures stable biodiversity to build our resiliency to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The combination of bills like H.R. 1676, the Trump staff firings, and budget cuts to the entire Department of the Interior is a recipe for disaster. I have concerns about how this combination will prioritize polluters' profits over the well-being of our communities and ecosystems.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member for 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Hoover, first of all, you employ an Oregonian who grew up in my district. She has spent her career working on the protection and preservation of wildlife, so excellent hire.

With that, what can't the network do now because it is operating as a pilot program?

Mr. HOOVER. Thank you, Ranking Member Hoyle, and I agree with your assessment of that particular staff person. Thank you for that acknowledgment.

Wildlife trafficking is a national problem in the United States. It is also a global problem. The current pilot is providing critical support to Southern California. And we are also taking calls and helping where we can elsewhere in the country, but we do not have the capacity to fully support the large volumes of live wildlife confiscations happening in Dallas and in Miami and in New York and in Chicago. These are all major hubs for illegally-traded wildlife.

The Wildlife Confiscations Network Act would help to remedy these gaps by supporting a nationwide effort to combat wildlife trafficking and provide critical care for confiscated live wildlife.

And I would also say it could provide a global model because this is a global crisis. And so the opportunity to demonstrate success here in the United States could be a model for other countries, as well. Thank you.

Ms. HOYLE. So I think the other thing is I would like for you to expand on what you talked about about the risk posed to the American public when wildlife is smuggled across the border, and also what would happen if these facilities were not able or were unwilling to take these animals?

Mr. HOOVER. Yes, the risks posed by wildlife trafficking are great. One of the most significant threats of the illegal wildlife trade is the potential spread of zoonotic disease to people, to pets, and to the livestock industry. Because illegal trade avoids quarantine requirements, veterinary health authorizations, and other

safeguards, illegally-traded wildlife has the potential to really wreak havoc on American health and food security.

In addition, in many cases these are dangerous animals. Primates and big cats traded as babies grow up and become dangerous to even knowledgeable owners. Venomous snakes smuggled through the mail are a threat not only to their potential recipient, but also to the unsuspecting Customs and Border Protection officer who may unwittingly open what was labeled kids' toys.

Lastly, wildlife trafficking is just that, it is trafficking of a commodity for a profit with clear ties to trafficking to other commodities such as guns, drugs, and even people. Taken as a whole, these activities undermine good governance, they destabilize governments, and they pose a threat to people both at home and abroad. The less we are able to be partners to support wildlife law enforcement, the more these threats are exacerbated.

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you, Mr. Hoover.

And Mr. Shields, briefly, in my district sports fishing is a way of life. I live across the street from a river with great fishing and is a critical part of our economy. The industry supports over 2,000 jobs and $300 million to Oregon's economy. And the Sports Fish Restoration Program is a common-sense way to make sure that businesses that make up this industry can continue to thrive.

Can you explain how the Sports Fish Restoration Program has helped companies like American Fishing Wire and the fishing tackle industry?

Mr. SHIELDS. Yes, thank you for your question.

Well, it goes back to common-sense management, and like I mentioned earlier, healthy fisheries and conservation efforts, they just don't happen on their own. So it requires a lot of resources, it requires a lot of work and help. And as an industry, if we don't do it, I don't know who would do it.

So there is a direct benefit for companies like American Fishing Wire, like our company, because we invest in the fund, we collect the taxes, we pay the taxes, and that comes back in terms of fisheries management. There are more fish, there is more access to the fish. It is a sustainable conservation model, so it works very well in that regard.

Ms. HOYLE. Thank you very much, and I yield back.

Ms. HAGEMAN. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Soto for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. SOTO. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Director Young, welcome to Washington. As you know, our State, tourism, recreation, and wildlife, all really important parts of the work that we get to do together with FWC. We have a bipartisan red snapper bill that is going to try to open up the season a little bit on the Atlantic. It was 1 day last year, to the disappointment of many. How important is that bill and then NOAA funding to make sure we get the science right?

Mr. YOUNG. Thank you, Congressman. Not a day goes by we don't hear about red snapper in some form or fashion in the State of Florida.

Mr. SOTO. You and me both.

Mr. YOUNG. Yes, sir. As we have done on the Gulf side of the State of Florida with State management, we have allotted for 126

days this past season to allow anglers and their families to get out and enjoy that resource. On the Atlantic side this year, only 2 days. Last year was just 1 day for the Atlantic's red snapper fishery. So after the amendment 59 has come out, we were pleased to see that there were not going to be any closures this year coming up, but still concerned. We still feel like the data that the NOAA has is flawed, and we were looking for State management at some point when it is right.

So we look forward to having those conversations moving forward. We look forward to the day where we can expand our exempted fishing permits in the Atlantic to help the quota so we can allow the families and visitors and residents in the State of Florida to have more access to our Atlantic fisheries, red snapper fishery.

Mr. SOTO. Well, we appreciate that. I also want to talk about birds, right? We have bald eagles in central Florida and ospreys, limpkins, Osceola turkeys that people come from all over the country to help hunt. The snail kite is one of the protected birds that we have in the Kissimmee Channel lakes, an area that is near and dear to me in our district. How has the snail kite population been going lately?

Mr. YOUNG. So I haven't, I don't have any updates on the snail kite population at this time. I can certainly get back to you on that, and give you the latest and greatest update on how the snail kite population is doing.

Mr. SOTO. Then manatees. We had a rough patch a few years ago. The Federal Government worked together with the State government to avoid further unusual mortality events where you have massive deaths of manatees. How do you feel the manatee population is rebounding, and the Indian River lagoon restoration is going?

Mr. YOUNG. Yes, so we are very pleased with the status of the manatee in the Indian River lagoon. I know that we had record low mortalities 2 years ago in the State of Florida, which is outstanding. We love to see those numbers low. And we are working hard with our partners, with the Federal partners on that. And I know alongside the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service we were able to put an end to the declaration of the unusual mortality event where we were feeding manatees for a period of time because they just didn't need it anymore because of the hard work by our conservationists in the area. So I am pleased to report things are looking better.

Mr. SOTO. Sure, and I got to work on that waiver with then Secretary Haaland. Obviously, SeaWorld a very big part of it. We are proud to have them in the district.

And these manatees, snail kites, and others, they are signs of a greater environmental situation. And so, I think as we talk to folks about the importance of recreation, of conservation, that these species, it is not just for them. We are doing it for the whole ecosystem so Floridians can enjoy it.

Wildlife corridors, a successful program that we need to continue to work on. We had hundreds of millions of dollars go through the American Rescue Plan to help fund it, along with then-President Biden and then Governor DeSantis. How is it going with the status

of wildlife corridors now? I know they are very big for recreation, for protecting species, for our water supply. How do you feel that is going?

Mr. YOUNG. Thanks for the question, it is an excellent one. Florida Wildlife Corridor is something that is very important to Florida. It is very important to the constituents. And we are doing all we can to support that. We feel like there has been gains in that. We were able to add—and I don't have the exact number of acreage—to the corridor. And I say "we," it is not just FWC, we are talking partners across the State of Florida, different landscape conservation across the State. We are all partners working together, and that is what truly it is all about.

And again, I said it earlier, conservation is about partnerships. And the Florida Wildlife Corridor is a good example of that success.

Mr. SOTO. Well, I want to encourage you to continue to work on environmental easements. Some of our ranchers are some of our greatest conservationists. It is a low-impact use of the land while still being able to preserve a lot of this land for both wildlife, for water, and to continue our food supply while preventing their grandkids to go condo and paving over the rest of Florida. So I am committed to you to work with you on continuing those key programs in Washington. Welcome.

Mr. YOUNG. I appreciate your support. Thank you.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, and I want to thank the witnesses for your valuable testimony and the members for your participation and your questions today.

The members of the Committee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we will ask that you please respond to those in writing if you receive them. Under Committee rule 3, members of the Committee must submit such questions to the Subcommittee clerk by 5 p.m. Eastern on Friday, June 27. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for your responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:57 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Westerman

Hon. JEFF HURD,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, D.C. 20515

June 23, 2025

Dear Representative Hurd,

On behalf of our organizations' millions of members and supporters, we write to express our strong support for the *Snow Water Supply Forecasting Reauthorization Act of 2025*, H.R. 3857.

Our organizations have a long history of working with Colorado River communities across the political spectrum to support Colorado River restoration, habitat for birds, fish, and other wildlife and, and diverse stakeholder engagement to advance nonpartisan efforts across the Basin. The Colorado River is one of the American West's national treasures. It is a foundation for the West's economy, supporting five million acres of irrigated farmland that deliver produce nationwide, and providing drinking water for over 40 million people, including under-served Tribal and rural communities. The Colorado River is also an essential part of the cultural fabric for 30 federally recognized Tribal Nations that call the Basin home. The river, though, is in crisis. Extended drought and resulting diminished stream flows pose increasingly serious challenges for cities, farms, wildlife, and recreation.

Snowpack in the Colorado River Basin and throughout the western United States plays a critical role in determining water availability for ecosystems, agriculture, municipalities, and hydropower production. As climate variability increases, accurate and timely snowpack measurements and forecasting tools are more vital than ever for resource planning, habitat management, and drought resilience. The proposed legislation would make strategic updates to the Bureau of Reclamation's Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program, ensuring continued investment in cutting-edge, integrated technologies such as airborne laser altimetry, imaging spectroscopy, and physics-based snowpack modeling.

We especially commend the bill's focus on improving the spatial and temporal resolution of snow data, supporting real-time integration with water supply forecasts, and enhancing capacity among local, state, and tribal partners. These enhancements will enable water and land managers to make better-informed decisions that benefit both people and the environment.

Our organizations have long supported science-based water management approaches, and this legislation exemplifies the type of forward-looking investment needed to adapt to changing hydrologic conditions. We urge Congress to swiftly advance and enact this important bill.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

American Rivers
National Audubon Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
The Nature Conservancy

Statement for the Record

Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Department of the Interior

H.R. 3857, Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program Reauthorization Act of 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record on H.R. 3857, the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program Reauthorization Act of 2025. Snow plays an important role in water supplies managed by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). Snow in mountain watersheds acts as a natural reservoir, holding the water that gradually melts to release flows as the season progresses. Understanding snow conditions informs water supply forecasts relied upon by reservoir operations and broader water management in the Western United States.

Activities to monitor snow and other basin conditions have expanded to cover more areas in recent years, and technological advancements have made these measurements more precise. Snow monitoring informs a host of forecasts ranging from short-term streamflow to seasonal water supply forecasts, and advancements in monitoring can lead to forecast benefits. However, uncertainty about snow conditions as well as timing and magnitude of snowmelt runoff is still a challenge Reclamation reservoir managers tackle on a near-daily basis. The variable nature of snow and the extreme environments that often accompany snow can pose challenges for effective, reliable snow monitoring.

Snow measurement can be conducted from different platforms, ranging from ground-based tools to aircraft and satellite-based systems, or estimated using advanced modeling tools. Each platform and each specific snow monitoring technology has tradeoffs between cost, spatial coverage, temporal coverage, accuracy, precision, resolution, geographic suitability, and reliability. The best platform for one location is not necessarily the best option in another.

Multiple federal agencies have a role in developing, deploying, and applying snow measurement technologies. For example, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) operates a network of approximately 900 snow measurement stations across the western United States. The National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration (NOAA) conducts snow survey flights using gamma sensors mounted on aircraft. NASA and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) support research activities that deploy snow monitoring technologies from ground, aircraft, and space-based platforms. The State of California Department of Water Resources (CA-DWR) also maintains a ground-based monitoring network. Reclamation partners with these agencies and others providing coordination and leadership to realize enhanced water supply forecasting and water management.

The Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program (SWSFP) was authorized in 2020. Reclamation implements SWSFP on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior to enhance snow monitoring and subsequent water supply forecasts to the benefit of water management. It achieves this in four ways: 1) Demonstrating and/or deploying emerging snow monitoring technologies; 2) Demonstrating and/or deploying improvements to existing snow monitoring technologies; 3) Deploying existing snow monitoring technologies in less covered areas; and 4) Improving the use of snow monitoring data to enhance water supply forecasts. SWSFP has awarded and worked with partners on a variety of projects using ground-based technologies, aircraft and satellite-based technologies, and advanced modeling. Reclamation has observed that multiple technologies can complement each other. For example, advanced modeling can be done across the west, but confidence in results is increased dramatically when paired with in-situ and remote measurements. Another example is airborne observations rely on ground-based measurements for validation and verification. Due to its role in managing water supply reservoirs, hydropower facilities, and water distribution systems, Reclamation has a strong interest in obtaining the most accurate snow monitoring and forecasting across the West.

H.R. 3857 would reauthorize and expand the program for fiscal years 2027 through 2031. The bill, as introduced, would direct the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Commissioner of Reclamation, to incorporate to the greatest extent practicable the use of information from "commercially available technologies" including airborne snow surveys and associated modeling when determining water supply forecasts or allocations to Federal water contractors. We note the original authorization directs the use of "emerging technologies" for these purposes. The bill would also allow for consideration of other technologies as there is continued need for on-the-ground snow measurements and satellite-derived earth observations which complement other monitoring and modeling technologies.

The bill would increase the authorized level of appropriations from a total of $15 million for fiscal years 2022 through 2026 to a total of $75 million for fiscal years 2027 to 2031, at $15 million annually. If appropriated, this additional funding would expand Reclamation's role into the use of airborne snow surveys and associated modeling and technology investments in complementary technologies that enhance the understanding of snowpack volume and snowmelt timing.

The Department supports the intent of H.R. 3857 but notes the bill would increase authorized federal spending. Should the committee advance this legislation, we would like to work with the bill sponsor to address this concern as well as ensuring that Reclamation's role does not duplicate other Federal agency efforts.