



July 26, 2023

The Honorable Cliff Bentz
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and
Fisheries
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and
Fisheries
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Bentz and Ranking Member Huffman,

In advance of the Subcommittee's July 27, 2023, hearing, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) would like to offer the following statement for the record in support of three bills before the Subcommittee. Specifically, CSF strongly supports the Coastal Habitat Conservation Act of 2023 (H.R. 2950), the SHARKED Act (H.R. 4051), and the Red Snapper Act (H.R. 4587).

The bipartisan and bicameral Coastal Habitat Conservation Act of 2023 (H.R. 2950) would authorize the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Coastal Program and increases authorized discretionary appropriations from \$20 million in Fiscal Year 2024 to \$25 million in 2028 for coastal protection, restoration, and enhancement efforts around the nation and in the Great Lakes. Beginning in the Chesapeake Bay in 1985, the successful Coastal Program has expanded to 23 priority coastal areas. Many of the important recreational marine and Great Lakes fisheries resources depend on healthy estuaries, coastal wetlands, and nearshore habitat for juvenile recruitment and robust fish populations. The Coastal Program is one of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's most successful resources for restoring and protecting fish and wildlife habitat on public and privately-owned lands through voluntary partnerships that serve as an effective model for improving coastal habitats.

H.R. 4051 brings focus to the increasing challenge of shark depredation, which negatively impacts fishing experiences, risks the safety of sharks and humans, and threatens fisheries sustainability. The bipartisan SHARKED Act would simply establish a non-regulatory task force that would be responsible for making recommendations for improving coordination and communication across the fisheries management community on shark depredation, as well as identifying research priorities and funding opportunities. This bill is an important first step toward recognizing the challenges of shark depredation nationally and establishing foundational knowledge that can be used to improve future management, education, and research actions.

In addition, we support the Red Snapper Act (H.R. 4587), a bill that would prevent the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) from implementing area closures in the South Atlantic until the Great Red Snapper Count, an unprecedented new fishery-independent red snapper assessment for the region, is complete, and the findings are integrated into the fishery management stock assessment. Despite the highest abundance of red snapper in decades,

NOAA recently considered seasonal area closures to all bottom fishing in the South Atlantic, including fishing for species other than snapper, to reduce the number of estimated red snapper dead discards outside of the two-day recreational red snapper harvest season. However, despite the very low estimates of older fish in the population, and the poor estimates of discard mortality in the fishery, the population continues to grow rapidly, indicating that NOAA's current stock assessment, which is based on very little fishery-independent data, does not reflect the true population status and that area closers are unwarranted. The results of the South Atlantic Great Red Snapper Count will shed much needed light on the discrepancy between assumption-riddled models and the actual population status in the water, which will lead to more appropriate and effective red snapper management.

Each of these pieces of legislation are important to fisheries conservation and to the nation's saltwater anglers. CSF sincerely appreciates the Subcommittee for scheduling a hearing on these bills, and we urge the full House Committee on Natural Resources to report each favorably during the next timely Committee business meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Horton".

Chris Horton
Senior Director, Fisheries Policy