



June 26, 2024

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 June 27, 2024, legislative hearing, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) would like to offer our strong support for each of the four bills before the Subcommittee.

The Fisheries Data Modernization and Accuracy Act of 2024 (H.R. 8705) will address a fundamental shortcoming of federal marine fisheries management, which is the ability to obtain reliable recreational catch estimates. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) is the federal recreational data collection program that was designed to provide trends in recreational catch and effort over time for multiple species and across a broad geographic area. It was never intended for in-season management, though MRIP data is currently being used for just that and is the primary reason for many needlessly short recreational seasons and abrupt season closures. H.R. 8705 will facilitate the establishment or improvement of more efficient and accurate state-based data collection systems that can effectively supplement or replace MRIP. For coastal states unable to develop their own data collection programs, the bill will establish a mechanism for scientific review of MRIP estimates and methodologies when the percent standard error (PSE) exceeds 30 percent. In addition, the bill promotes more fishery-independent surveys to get a more reliable, real time estimate of stock abundance to update stock assessments and facilitate more timely management adjustments.

H.R. 8704 requires the Secretary of Commerce to establish a grant program to foster enhanced coexistence between ocean users and North Atlantic right whales and other large cetacean species. The currently proposed and overly precautionary North Atlantic right whale vessel speed reduction rule before the Office of Management and Budget will do little for whale conservation. Based on the number of suspected North Atlantic right whale strikes by boats 35-64 feet in length over the last 15 years, versus the number of fishing vessel trips taken during that same time, there is less than one in a million chance of recreational fishing boats in this category fatally striking a whale under existing regulations. Instead, efforts should be focused on using today's advanced technologies to identify real solutions for whale conservation, and this bill provides an expeditious pathway through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant program to more effectively conserve large whales using technology than the vessel speed rule currently proposed by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The Modernizing Access to Our Public Oceans Act (H.R. 7925), also known as the MAPOceans Act, will eliminate confusion for boating access and fishing restrictions on our nation's marine and coastal waterways through standardizing, consolidating, and publishing digital data concerning boating and fishing regulations on marine waters under federal management. NOAA manages more federal waters than any other federal agency, and the list of restrictions, ranging from areas open or closed to fishing/boating, allowable fishing gear, and boat propulsion limitations, can vary greatly and change frequently. This bill will ensure those regulations are readily available for GPS smart phones applications and marine electronics, providing anglers and boaters with the information they need at their fingertips to legally and safely enjoy a day at sea.

The Resilient Coast and Estuaries Act (H.R. 6841) would reauthorize and make improvements to two important programs established under the Coastal Zone Management Act: the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) and the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS). Both programs are state and locally driven to conserve and restore ecologically important coastal lands and estuaries. In addition to providing benefits such as storm surge abatement and preventing shoreline erosion, these programs also contribute to healthy fisheries by providing important nursery areas for fish and crustacean recruitment.

In closing, each of these pieces of legislation are important 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".

Senior Director, Fisheries Policy