



To: Hon. Patricia P. Rucker
Chair, Senate Government Organization Committee
Charleston, WV 25305

Hon. Jack D. Woodrum
Vice Chair, Senate Government Organization Committee
Charleston, WV 25305

Re: Senate Bill 801 – Public Waterway Access Act

Position: Support

Date: 4/1/2025

Chairwoman Rucker, Vice Chair Woodrum, and Honorable Members of the West Virginia State Senate Government Organization Committee,

My name is Kaleigh Leager, and I am the Assistant Manager, Mid-Atlantic States for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF). I am writing to you in support of Senate Bill 801 (SB 801), which would ensure public access to the state's river and streams for recreational purposes.

Founded in 1989, CSF is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

Lack of access is one of the biggest issues facing sportsmen and women today and is reported as the number one reason (over which state agencies have control) that lapsed hunters and anglers cite when asked why they no longer hunt or fish. Additionally, opportunities to expand angling access throughout the country have become increasingly limited in recent years due to increases in private ownership along waterways and attendant riparian rights limiting new access construction. Although state natural resource agencies have funds available to create angler access through Sportfish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (paid by boaters and anglers), many states

have already “built out” the available and affordable angling access opportunities on limited riparian lands. With outright land acquisition opportunities limited, states must look for new avenues for providing access to our nation’s waterways. One often overlooked opportunity is to prioritize the establishment of new access points when state highway transportation departments are planning, designing, and building bridges and roads along and across public waterways.¹ SB 801 seeks to address this by requiring the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (DNR) and the West Virginia Department of Transportation (WV DOT) to work together to create public access points to rivers or streams when new bridges are constructed, or existing ones are replaced if it is practical and safe to do so, with the potential for a cost savings to the WV DOT as they would no longer be required to install riprap, regrade, reseed or install plantings once the bridge construction is complete.

In 2013, Maryland passed [House Bill 797 \(HB 797\)](#), the Waterways Access Bill, which provided an opportunity to increase the state’s 10,000 miles of waterways and 4,000 miles of shoreline by requiring transportation projects to consider the feasibility of waterway access along the state’s roads and bridges. Maryland’s HB 797 was an innovative step forward and a great example of how to improve recreational angling access throughout the country by way of road and bridge construction projects. With the passage of SB 801, West Virginia would become the second state to do so.

Additionally, one of DNR’s primary objectives is providing access to public waters.² SB 801 would likely strengthen this objective and potentially provide additional public access points. Such projects are supported and approved for use of federal match dollars through the Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux (DJ/WB) Acts. This Act is one of two American System of Conservation Funding (ASCF) cornerstones that authorize federal funding for state fish and wildlife agencies to manage and restore fish and wildlife resources and their habitats.

In closing, CSF supports legislation that will expand access and opportunities for anglers in the Mountain State and encourages the recruitment, retention, and reactivation of West Virginia’s anglers. With this, I kindly request your support on SB 801.

Sincerely,



Kaleigh E. Leager
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¹ [Considering Recreational Angling Access in Transportation Projects – Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation](#)

² [Fish Stocking - Public Access Development – WV DNR](#)