

March 13, 2024

The Honorable Cliff Bentz  
Chair  
House Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries  
United States House of Representatives  
409 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman  
Ranking Member  
House Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries  
United States House of Representatives  
2445 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Bentz and Ranking Member Huffman,

The undersigned hunting, fishing, and conservation organizations, and professional societies write to share our support for the bipartisan Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act (H.R.6841) and to encourage the committee to advance this legislation. With your efforts, Congress can conserve coastal and estuary habitats across the United States and defend outdoor recreation opportunities and economies that rely on effective conservation and research.

Along the almost 100,000 miles of American shorelines, outdoor recreation is a pillar for local coastal communities. Nationwide, the economic output of outdoor recreation is calculated at \$1.1 trillion, accounting for 2.2 percent (\$563.7 billion) of the total U.S. GDP and 3.2 percent of total U.S. employment. As of 2021, all of the top ten states for outdoor recreation spending were located along our oceans or Great Lakes. And according to NOAA, “the ocean-based tourism and recreation sector alone employs more Americans than the entire real estate industry, as well as more people than building construction and telecommunications combined.” For the 40 percent of Americans living in coastal counties and for the millions of Americans that travel to our coasts every year, the ability to hunt, fish, and recreate along our shorelines represents both a lifestyle and a lifeline.

As we recognize the reliance of coastal and Great Lakes communities on outdoor recreation, it’s also crucial to recognize outdoor recreation’s own reliance on forward-thinking conservation and research. This industry and its traditions are deeply tied to the health of our natural spaces and local ecosystems. Through the Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act, the House Committee on Natural Resources has the opportunity to strengthen our coastal and Great Lakes environments in the face of growing challenges.

H.R.6841 centers on two vital conservation and research programs established under the Coastal Zone Management Act: the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) and the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS). CELCP was originally authorized to conserve ecologically important coastal lands and recreational opportunities. The program helped conserve more than 110,000 acres through assistance to state and local governments for conservation easements in coastal and estuarine areas across the country – including the Nemadji River in Wisconsin and Minnesota, Chowan Swamp in North Carolina, Lapakahi Marine Life Conservation District in Hawaii, South Slough Reserve in Oregon, Cat Island in Mississippi, and beyond. However, in recent years, CELCP has lost its funding sources, after dedicated Congressional appropriations were rolled back in 2013 and other federal funding avenues were depleted in 2017.

The NERRS was created to provide for the stewardship, research, training, and education necessary to conserve and study estuarine systems. Today, the system serves as a network of 30 coastal sites covering 1.4 million acres of study area, offering vital information on nonpoint source pollution, community resilience, habitat restoration, and invasive species. Of the 32 largest cities in the world, 22 are located on estuaries, and our research reserves help ensure that we maintain and expand the biodiversity, ecosystem

health, community benefits, and economic impacts that estuaries foster at home and abroad – providing social, economic, and environmental benefits, particularly toward outdoor recreation, that far exceed their cost of operation.

If enacted, the Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act would take necessary and overdue steps to reinforce both the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program and the National Estuarine Research Reserve System. The bill would revitalize CELCP, renaming the program to the Coastal and Estuarine Resilience and Restoration Program, reauthorizing funding to restore conservation practices, and recalibrating program language to address emerging challenges to coastal communities. It would also enable the NERRS to expand their research and data monitoring supporting local conservation and management.

The passage of the Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act would help ensure the continued prosperity of our coastal and Great Lakes environments, safeguarding outdoor recreation opportunities for millions of Americans and strengthening the widespread economic benefits of one of America's most impactful and growing sectors. As hunters, anglers, conservationists, and professional societies, we support H.R.6841 and we strongly encourage the House Committee on Natural Resources to advance this legislation.

Thank you for your time and for your support for outdoor recreation. We look forward to working with you to pass this important bill.

Sincerely,

AFFTA Fisheries Fund  
American Fisheries Society  
American Fly Fishing Trade Association  
American Forest Foundation  
American Shore & Beach Preservation Association  
American Sportfishing Association  
Angler Action Foundation  
Association of State Floodplain Managers  
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers  
Bass Anglers Sportsman Society  
Bonefish & Tarpon Trust  
Coastal Conservation Association  
Coastal States Organization  
Ducks Unlimited

Guy Harvey Foundation  
International Game Fish Association  
Izaak Walton League of America  
Land Trust Alliance  
National Audubon Society  
National Estuarine Research Reserve Association  
National Wildlife Federation  
New York State Conservation Council  
North American Falconers Association  
Restore America's Estuaries  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Wildlife Society  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Wild Salmon Center

Cc:

The Honorable Bruce Westerman, Committee on Natural Resources, Chairman  
The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva, Committee on Natural Resources, Ranking Member  
Committee on Natural Resources, Majority  
Committee on Natural Resources, Minority