

on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or votes objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

The House will resume proceedings on postponed questions at a later time.

# ALABAMA UNDERWATER FOREST NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY AND PROTECTION ACT

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 897) to provide for the establishment of the Alabama Underwater Forest National Marine Sanctuary, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

## H.R. 897

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Alabama Underwater Forest National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act”.

### SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) An ancient cypress forest dating back 50,000 to 70,000 years has been exposed in the Gulf of Mexico off the Alabama coastline.

(2) The cypress trees, which were uncovered by massive waves associated with Hurricane Ivan, are still rooted in the mud they were growing in at least 50,000 years ago.

(3) The Underwater Forest site is unique on a global scale, the only known site where trees between 50,000 and 70,000 years old have been preserved intact with the ecosystem they were growing in.

(4) Exploration of the site continues to yield invaluable scientific insight in a variety of fields, though scientists have just begun to study the ancient forest.

### SEC. 3. POLICY AND PURPOSE.

(a) **POLICY.**—It is the policy of the United States to protect and preserve the ancient cypress trees located off the coast of Alabama, known as the Alabama Underwater Forest.

(b) **PURPOSE.**—The purpose of this Act is to protect the resources of the area described in section 5(b), to educate and interpret for the public regarding the ancient Alabama Underwater Forest environment, and to manage human uses of the Alabama Underwater Forest National Marine Sanctuary consistent with this Act.

### SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act—

(1) **SANCTUARY.**—The term “Sanctuary” means the Alabama Underwater Forest National Marine Sanctuary designated under section 5(a).

(2) **SECRETARY.**—the term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Commerce.

### SEC. 5. SANCTUARY DESIGNATION.

(a) **DESIGNATION.**—The area described in subsection (b) is designated as the Alabama Underwater Forest National Marine Sanctuary pursuant to title III of the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1431 et seq.).

(b) **AREA INCLUDED.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Sanctuary shall consist only of all waters and submerged lands within the boundary described in paragraph (2).

(2) **BOUNDARY.**—The boundary referred to in paragraph (1) shall encompass only the area within the following coordinates:

(A) 30 degrees, 7 minutes, 20.2116 seconds north latitude; 87 degrees, 49 minutes, 15.7404 seconds west longitude.

(B) 30 degrees, 7 minutes, 20.2116 seconds north latitude; 87 degrees, 43 minutes, 44.8536 seconds west longitude.

(C) 30 degrees, 5 minutes, 42.6552 seconds north latitude; 87 degrees, 49 minutes, 15.7404 seconds west longitude.

(D) 30 degrees, 5 minutes, 42.6552 seconds north latitude; 87 degrees, 43 minutes, 44.8536 seconds west longitude.

(E) 30 degrees, 7 minutes, 20.2116 seconds north latitude; 87 degrees, 49 minutes, 15.7404 seconds west longitude.

(3) **CHARTS.**—The Sanctuary shall be generally identified and depicted on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration charts that shall be maintained on file and kept available for public examination during regular business hours at the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and in online format and which shall be updated to reflect boundary modifications made pursuant to this section.

### SEC. 6. PROHIBITION OF CERTAIN USES.

(a) **PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES.**—The following activities are prohibited and are unlawful for any person to conduct or to cause to be conducted within the Sanctuary:

(1) Cutting, removing, or any kind of subsurface salvage of the cypress trees.

(2) Lowering below the surface of the water any grappling, suction, conveyor, dredging, or wrecking device.

(3) Detonating below the surface of the water any explosive or explosive mechanism.

(4) Drilling or coring the seabed.

(5) Lowering, laying, positioning, or raising any type of seabed cable or cable-laying device.

(b) **EXCEPTIONS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The prohibitions in subsection (a) shall not apply to the following:

(A) Fishing, diving, mooring, or similar recreational or commercial activities.

(B) Necessary operations of public vessels, including operations essential for national defense, law enforcement, and responses to emergencies that threaten life, property, or the environment.

(C) Construction or placement of artificial reef structures for the purpose of enhancing fishery resources, fishing opportunities, or recreational diving opportunities.

(D) Exploration, development, or production of oil or gas pursuant to a lease, permit, or other authorization, provided such lease, permit, or authorization is issued on or before the date of the enactment of this Act.

(2) **OTHER ACTIVITIES.**—The Secretary, acting through the Director of the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, may allow a person to conduct an activity that would otherwise be prohibited under subsection (a) if such activity meets the standards of Title III of the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1431 et seq.), as determined by the Secretary.

### SEC. 7. COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN.

(a) **PREPARATION OF PLAN.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Not later than 2 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation with appropriate Federal, State, and local government authorities and with the advisory council established under section 8, shall develop a comprehensive management plan and implement regulations to achieve the policy and purpose of this Act.

(2) **APPLICABLE LAW.**—In developing the comprehensive management plan and implementing regulations under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall follow the procedures described in sections 303 and 304 of the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1433 and 1434).

(3) **PLAN DETAILS.**—The comprehensive management plan required under paragraph (1) shall—

(A) facilitate all public and private uses of the Sanctuary compatible with the primary objective of Sanctuary resource protection, with a focus on facilitating—

(i) fishing, diving, or similar recreational or commercial activities; and

(ii) construction or placement of artificial reef structures for the purpose of enhancing fishery resources, fishing opportunities, or recreational diving opportunities;

(B) consider temporal and geographical zoning, to ensure protection of Sanctuary resources;

(C) identify needs for research and ecological monitoring; and

(D) ensure coordination and cooperation between Sanctuary managers and—

(i) other Federal, State, and local authorities with jurisdiction within or adjacent to the Sanctuary; and

(ii) owners, operators, and stakeholders with respect to existing oil and gas operations within or adjacent to the Sanctuary.

(b) **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.**—The Secretary shall provide for the participation of the general public in the development of the comprehensive management plan.

### SEC. 8. ADVISORY COUNCIL.

(a) **ESTABLISHMENT.**—The Secretary shall establish an advisory council pursuant to section 315 of the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1445a) to advise the Secretary with respect to the designation and management of the Sanctuary.

(b) **MEMBERSHIP.**—The Secretary shall include a representative from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources as a voting member of the advisory council.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) and the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. LEE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas.

## GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 897, the bill now under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 897, the Alabama Underwater Forest National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act.

Representative CARL’s legislation seeks to protect an underwater forest located 10 miles off the coast of Gulf Shores, Alabama, in the Gulf of Mexico.

At roughly 60,000 years old, this forest provides a window into our past in a way that is not found anywhere else on Earth. Protecting this resource is critical for the research efforts that it supports.

This forest was first discovered by local fishermen in 2004 in the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan and has received attention from scientists and universities around the world.

H.R. 897 designates the forest as a sanctuary in a manner which embraces the multiple use of our Nation’s natural resources. The legislation protects the forest by prohibiting the cutting or removing of the forest’s trees while also providing protections for national

security and law enforcement activity, commercial and recreational fishing, and energy production that was previously permitted or authorized.

I commend my colleague, Representative CARL, for his efforts to advance the legislation. Mr. Speaker, I support H.R. 897, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

H.R. 897 would establish the Alabama Underwater Forest National Marine Sanctuary, which would safeguard a remarkable and ancient natural reserve.

In 2004, Hurricane Ivan unearthed a well-preserved ancient cypress forest, still rooted in the mud, 60 feet underwater in the Gulf of Mexico, south of Gulf Shores, Alabama.

Scientific analysis of the cypress trees reveals that they are over 50,000 years old, dating back to a time when the sea levels were approximately 400 feet lower than today.

This forest is a unique relic of our planet's past and the only known site where a coastal forest of such antiquity remains preserved.

The Alabama underwater forest is a valuable source of information, offering insights into ancient climate conditions, regional rainfall patterns, insect populations, and plant life on the Gulf Coast before humans inhabited the Americas.

However, its preservation is under threat.

In 2020, a furniture company applied for a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers to harvest the ancient cypress wood for profit.

Establishing this marine sanctuary will prevent commercial exploitation and protect this irreplaceable ecosystem for future generations. It will ensure that the site remains undisturbed, allowing for continued scientific research and environmental education.

Additionally, the sanctuary will provide opportunities for ecotourism and research, boosting the local economy while fostering a greater understanding of our natural heritage.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation to protect and preserve this unique piece of natural history. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. CARL), the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. CARL. Mr. Speaker, my bill, the Alabama Underwater Forestry National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act is an important measure to safeguard Alabama's ancient underwater cypress forest.

Importantly, this bill strikes a balance between conservation and recreational use of this site. By designating the underwater forest as a national marine sanctuary, we are preserving a one-of-a-kind, 60,000-year-old natural marvel. There isn't anything

quite like Alabama's underwater forest that has been discovered in terms of the size and the age that we are dealing with here.

The underwater forest offers an opportunity for recreational opportunities such as scuba diving and fishing. The bill ensures that the site remains protected, prohibiting the removal of ancient trees while allowing responsible access for the public. Just like Yellowstone or Yosemite, this forest should be accessible to tourists while protected from disruptive activities—and this bill does just that.

It is critical to recognize the benefits that will ripple through south Alabama's economy. We are not just preserving a natural wonder; we are laying the foundation for sustained economic gains. This legislation ensures the underwater cypress forest remains a source of pride, wonder, and economic opportunity for generations to come.

I urge my colleagues to support the passage of this bill.

Ms. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Adoption of H.R. 897 will protect the underwater forest in the Gulf of Mexico for future scientific and research efforts while allowing for the multiple uses of the Gulf to continue to occur.

This legislation also ensures that the Department of Commerce and NOAA work with State and local officials in Alabama, including the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. This approach to conservation and the protection of natural resources is consistent with the approach that Republicans have taken toward these issues ensuring that the State and local officials are consulted and that voices with varying perspectives are heard and accommodated.

Mr. Speaker, I will just add that this is a very unique opportunity. A little over 20 years ago we had no idea this forest was even there, and because the hurricane had deep waves that scoured the forest floor, they found this marvelous resource of a cypress forest that once grew obviously on dry land when the ocean was at least 60 and probably many feet less deep than it is right now.

To be able to have this to study to tell us more about our past which should inform us about our future is truly remarkable.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 897, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

#### LONG ISLAND SOUND RESTORATION AND STEWARDSHIP REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2023

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5441) to reauthorize Long Island Sound programs, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5441

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Reauthorization Act of 2023”.

#### SEC. 2. REAUTHORIZATION OF LONG ISLAND SOUND PROGRAMS.

(a) LONG ISLAND SOUND GRANTS.—Section 119(h) of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1269(h)) is amended by striking “2019 through 2023” and inserting “2024 through 2028”.

(b) LONG ISLAND SOUND STEWARDSHIP GRANTS.—Section 11(a) of the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act of 2006 (33 U.S.C. 1269 note; Public Law 109-359) is amended, in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by striking “2019 through 2023” and inserting “2024 through 2028”.

(c) TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.—Section 119(g) of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1269(g)) is amended by redesignating paragraph (4) as paragraph (3).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) and the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. LEE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 5441, the bill now under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5441, the Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Reauthorization Act of 2023.

Representative LALOTA's legislation reauthorizes programs that promote collaboration between Federal agencies, State and local governments, and other stakeholders to protect and preserve the Long Island Sound.

H.R. 5441 reauthorizes the Long Island Sound Study through 2028 at current funding levels. The Long Island