

The program works to create resilient coastal ecosystems, support habitat connectivity, recover Federal trust in priority species, and promote community stewardship of fish and wildlife resources. It does so by providing both technical and financial assistance to States, Tribes, coastal communities, and conservation organizations for public and private lands.

This successful program has completed nearly 5,000 projects and collaborated with over 6,400 partners, with the outcome of protecting more than 2.3 million acres of habitat and improving land and water for the people and wildlife that live there.

Our country and our planet are facing a climate crisis and a biodiversity crisis, so efforts like these are essential.

Authorizing the Coastal Program through H.R. 2950 will enable the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to continue identifying threats to coastal landscapes, providing coastal habitat planning and assessments, ensuring restoration and protection for resilient coastlines, and developing capacity building between private and public partnerships.

I strongly support the Coastal Habitat Conservation Act and urge my colleagues to pass this bill. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Puerto Rico (Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN).

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2950, the Coastal Habitat Conservation Act. I was proud to join Congressman HUFFMAN as the co-lead on this bipartisan bill, which would congressionally authorize the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program.

This program is one of the Service's most effective and proven initiatives, bringing together public and private partners on a voluntary basis to protect and improve coastal habitats and ecosystems across our Nation. These efforts are carried out throughout 24 priority coastal areas along the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Gulf of Mexico, the Great Lakes, and of course, the Caribbean.

In 2023, the Coastal Program worked with partners and local communities to implement 153 conservation projects across 19 States and territories, restoring and protecting more than 87,000 acres. This was accomplished by leveraging \$3 in partners' contributions for every Federal dollar invested in the program.

In the case of Puerto Rico, we have seen firsthand the success and the impact of this program. Between 2010 and 2021, the Coastal Program supported 218 voluntary-based projects on the island, which contributed to the restoration of almost 2,900 acres of habitat. These include projects to restore coastal dunes, wetlands, and mangrove forests. It also supported partnerships with local farmers to convert sun-

grown coffee farms into shade-grown coffee farms which help protect streams and coral reefs by reducing sources of sediment and nutrient pollution.

I trust that formally authorizing the Coastal Program, as H.R. 2950 seeks to do, will ensure it has the necessary tools to continue supporting similar locally driven conservation projects across our Nation, coastal States, and of course territories.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2950.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. HUFFMAN), the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from New York and thank my colleagues for understanding the importance of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Coastal Program and for supporting this legislation to, for the first time, authorize it in statute.

Coastal conservation is not just about protecting our environment. It is about supporting a thriving economy. However, we do face serious threats—climate change, pollution, unsustainable development, and other threats—to our coastal habitats, causing rapid deterioration of these critical resources.

I want to be very clear: This is not a local issue. Over 53 percent of the United States population lives near coastal watersheds. These areas are home to 45 percent of federally listed threatened and endangered species. Over 60 million American jobs depend on the health of our coasts.

These coastal habitats are complex, dynamic, and they don't always fit neatly within the boundaries that often guide our conservation work. The Service's Coastal Program recognizes this, and it allows for management flexibility by providing technical and financial assistance for coastal land acquisitions. This helps the Service strategically conserve coastal habitat beyond the confines of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

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The Coastal Program has a great record of success. Since its inception in Chesapeake Bay in 1985, the program has expanded to 23 other priority coastal areas along the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and in the Gulf of Mexico, Great Lakes, and the Caribbean, including wetlands, estuaries, beaches, and mangrove forests.

Within these areas, the Service facilitates a voluntary, partnership-based relationship with coastal communities to conserve and restore coastal ecosystems and benefit fish, wildlife, and people alike.

While the Coastal Program is designed to help conserve and recover priority habitat in coastal areas, it can only be effective with adequate resources. That is why the Coastal Habitat Conservation Act of 2023 provides statutory authority to the program by

authorizing \$16.9 million annually over the next 5 fiscal years.

I am pleased that we are here supporting efforts to bring together people and private partners to voluntarily protect and improve coastal habitats. This is an approach that helps strike a balance between working landscapes and habitat conservation in our coastal communities.

With this bipartisan bill, we can ensure that this great program will continue to drive locally led conservation projects across coastal States and territories, preserving the health and resilience of coastal habitats to benefit the wildlife communities and economies that depend on them for generations to come.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2950 authorizes the Coastal Program in a fiscally responsible manner and provides for increased congressional oversight and direction of the program.

By doing so, we, as Members of Congress, will be better able to fulfill our oversight responsibilities. At the same time, this program continues its work conserving coastal ecosystems for the benefit of species and our constituents.

Mr. Speaker, 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. 2950, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### ELECTRONIC PERMITTING MODERNIZATION ACT

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5509) to modernize permitting systems at the Department of the Interior, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5509

*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 "Electronic Permitting Modernization Act".

#### SEC. 2. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR PERMIT ACCESSIBILITY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—In order to improve the overall economy, efficiency, and management of operations and activities of the Department of the Interior (referred to in this section as the "Department"), reduce paperwork, and provide high-quality services and access to the public, the Secretary of the Interior shall, to the extent practicable—

(1) design and deliver modernized electronic permitting systems to accept, process, and record applications (including plan submissions, payment activity, and other related correspondence) for permits, forms, and other paperwork required for activities regulated by the Department;

(2) provide a centralized electronic permitting system online repository, available to the public on the Department's website, that includes—

(A) hyperlinks to facilitate navigation to all Department electronic permitting systems; and

(B) with respect to permits, the contact information for the appropriate Department employees providing assistance to State, Tribal, and local governments; and

(3) provide to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate periodic updates on the implementation of paragraphs (1) and (2).

(b) **DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION PROHIBITED.**—No information described in section 552(b) of title 5, United States Code, or protected from disclosure by another law of the United States shall be disclosed under this Act.

(c) **DUPLICATION OF SYSTEMS NOT PERMITTED.**—No system shall be duplicated under this Act.

(d) **CONSULTATION.**—In developing the permitting systems required under section 2 of this Act, the Secretary of the Interior shall consult with States, local governments, Indian Tribes and other stakeholders who apply for agency permits and will use the permitting systems.

**SEC. 3. CONFORMING AMENDMENT TO ENSURE CONSISTENCY WITH THE FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT OF 2023.**

In developing the permitting systems required under section 2 of this Act, the Secretary of the Interior shall ensure that the Department's electronic permitting systems are consistent with the priorities identified in section 110 of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4336d) with respect to any permit that requires review under that Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) and the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ) 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 may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 5509, 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, Representative PORTER's bipartisan legislation directs the Secretary of the Interior to design and deliver electronic permitting systems for permits, forms, and other required paperwork to the extent practical.

Republicans have long supported streamlining and simplifying the permitting process. Additionally, the minority worked with us to address a concern

raised with the legislation and how it would interact with recent changes to NEPA enacted under the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

These discussions led to changes to Ms. PORTER's legislation to clarify that any permitting system related to NEPA be consistent with the priorities identified in the FRA's NEPA provision.

This legislation aims to streamline the management of operations of the Department of the Interior, improving access to our public lands and Department facilities.

Modernizing the permitting process is an overdue task needed to increase departmental efficiency and improve transparency.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of my colleague Representative PORTER's bill, the Electronic Permitting Modernization Act.

This legislation would codify parts of a Biden executive order that improves the navigability of the Federal Government's permitting process, and the bill would require the Department of the Interior to design and deliver a modernized electronic permitting system.

Permitting reform has been a popular topic this Congress in the Committee on Natural Resources, and on this topic, it is rare that we can achieve a bipartisan win, but we can all be for bringing the Federal permitting system into the 21st century.

That is why this bill would require the Department of the Interior to provide a centralized online repository on its website for public access to its electronic permitting system. It would also make easily available the contact information of the appropriate Department of the Interior employees who can assist State, Tribal, and local governments with permit applications.

These changes will make the lives of our constituents easier by simplifying the process of applying for a permit.

We know that we can make permitting more efficient. We can speed up processing times, and we can improve transparency for everyone involved, all without sacrificing community engagement or environmental protections.

From my district in the Bronx and Queens to across the American West, Americans are all too familiar with the legacy of sacrifice zones. Having online options for DOI permits is a commonsense solution to a part of an important issue that we all care about.

This bill also requires the Department of the Interior to provide periodic updates to the House Committee on Natural Resources, which will allow us to continue to monitor and upgrade our permitting processes.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly support Representative PORTER's Electronic Permitting Modernization Act, and I urge the House to approve it.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA).

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the effort of my colleague from the OC in bringing this forward.

Really, it is about simplicity. It is about streamlining a process for people who are just seeking to engage in a process that requires paperwork, permits, and forms. Why would we not make that easier for them?

With all the different interests and needs that we could have, especially in our rural lands—parks, public lands, and the recreational users of those—the Electronic Permitting Modernization Act creates a simple online website to get and complete any necessary permits.

On the other hand, when businesses are interested in raising, logging, mining, or anything else, they will be able to find any approval documents or applications on a single web page, one-stop shopping.

I am happy that we can make it a little bit easier because, for my farming business and me, sometimes it is hard to get to the forms you need and get the stuff done. That is frustrating because all you want to do is get back to what you are doing there to begin with.

This bill actually builds off some of the work we completed last year with the Fiscal Responsibility Act by further directing Federal agencies under the Department of the Interior to provide electronic means to complete any required documentation.

This is a good step to make it simpler to get the work done. I hope it is not an excuse to create more permits and more paperwork, but this is a great way to help out with people who are just seeking to get their work done.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 5509, and I appreciate the bipartisan effort on this.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PORTER), the sponsor of the bill.

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, whether you are a Democrat, Republican, or Independent, we all benefit when the government works the way it is supposed to.

A 21st century nation deserves a 21st century government. The problem is too many Federal agencies still rely on outdated systems not designed for the people they serve. This leaves people looking for help stuck in a tangled web of confusing application processes, clunky government websites, and poor customer support. Long delays and processing times often follow, adding to the frustration our constituents feel.

It is why so many of them turn to us, their Member of Congress, for help. Our casework teams work hard every day to cut through the red tape, but it shouldn't have to come to that.

When we fail to modernize our way of government, we are wasting tax dollars

on inefficiency, but there is something we can do today with this bill to make government applications easier to find and simpler to submit and process.

Congress can pass the Electronic Permitting Modernization Act, which I lead with my good friend across the aisle, Representative DOUG LAMALFA.

This commonsense bill encourages the Department of the Interior to offer an online option for as many of its permits as possible. It creates a web page where our constituents can find links to the Department's online permits. Then, it would task the Department of the Interior to report back to Congress periodically on its progress toward electronic permitting.

These simple steps are no-brainers, but they are necessary to keep our government on track and to make the permitting process work for all users.

Creating an online option for more permits will make permitting easier for everyone, not just the applicant. It will reduce the amount of paperwork mailed to the agency, speed up processing times, and finally help bring our government into the 21st century.

At the same time, this bill would help Congress hold the Department of the Interior accountable for its work. With this bill, we could more easily see which bureaus are getting things done here with us in the 21st century and which bureaus are still having workers sitting in windowless rooms, opening envelopes with paper checks and forms in triplicate.

What matters the most about this bill is that it improves the daily lives of the people we serve.

Look, I am a single mom with three kids. When your life is anything like mine, you just want things that you expect to be easy to actually be easy. Let's be clear: It should be easy to find and apply for a permit to comply with the law.

Let's simplify people's lives just a little bit. Let's show them that this part of government using their public lands works efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, I thank, again, my co-lead, Representative LAMALFA, as well as Chairman WESTERMAN, Ranking Member GRIJALVA, and their staff for their work on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support the Electronic Permitting Modernization Act.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, the Federal Government is long overdue in doing the work needed to bring its permitting processes into the 21st century. The bill before us instructs the Secretary to create an electronic permitting system to accept, process, and record applications for any permitting process under the Department's jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, even though the gentleman from California opposed my commonsense, straightforward forestry

bill earlier today, I do recognize, commend, and support Representative PORTER for her work on this legislation, 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. 5509, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### UPPER COLORADO AND SAN JUAN RIVER BASINS ENDANGERED FISH RECOVERY PROGRAMS REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2024

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4596) to reauthorize the Bureau of Reclamation to provide cost-shared funding to implement the endangered and threatened fish recovery programs for the Upper Colorado and San Juan River Basins, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4596

*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 "Upper Colorado and San Juan River Basins Endangered Fish Recovery Programs Reauthorization Act of 2024".

#### SEC. 2. REAUTHORIZATION OF UPPER COLORADO AND SAN JUAN RIVER BASINS ENDANGERED FISH AND THREATENED FISH RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMS.

(a) PURPOSE.—Section 1 of Public Law 106-392 (114 Stat. 1602) is amended by inserting "and threatened" after "endangered".

(b) DEFINITIONS.—Section 2 of Public Law 106-392 (114 Stat. 1602; 116 Stat. 3113) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by striking "to implement the Recovery Implementation Program for the Endangered Fish Species in the Upper Colorado River dated September 29, 1987, and extended by the Extension of the Cooperative Agreement dated December 6, 2001, and the 1992 Cooperative Agreement to implement the San Juan River Recovery Implementation Program dated October 21, 1992, and as they may be amended" and inserting "for the Recovery Implementation Program for Endangered Species in the Upper Colorado River Basin dated September 29, 1987, and the 1992 Cooperative Agreement for the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program dated October 21, 1992, as the agreements may be amended and extended";

(2) in paragraph (6)—

(I) by inserting "or threatened" after "endangered"; and

(B) by striking "removal or translocation" and inserting "control";

(3) in paragraph (7), by striking "long-term" each place it appears;

(4) in paragraph (8), in the second sentence, by striking "1988 Cooperative Agreement and the 1992 Cooperative Agreement" and inserting "Recovery Implementation Programs";

(5) in paragraph (9)—

(A) by striking "leases and agreements" and inserting "acquisitions";

(B) by inserting "or threatened" after "endangered"; and

(C) by inserting ", as approved under the Recovery Implementation Programs" after "nonnative fishes"; and

(6) in paragraph (10), by inserting "pursuant to the Recovery Implementation Program for Endangered Species in the Upper Colorado River Basin" after "Service".

(c) AUTHORIZATION TO FUND RECOVERY PROGRAMS.—Section 3 of Public Law 106-392 (114 Stat. 1603; 116 Stat. 3113; 120 Stat. 290; 123 Stat. 1310; 126 Stat. 2444; 133 Stat. 809) (as amended by section 101 of division CC of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Public Law 117-328)) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) in paragraph (1), by striking "(1) There is hereby authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary, \$88,000,000 to undertake capital projects to carry out the purposes of this Act. Such funds" and inserting the following:

"(1) AUTHORIZATION.—

"(A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subparagraph (B), there is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary for use by the Bureau of Reclamation to undertake capital projects to carry out the purposes of this Act \$50,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2024 through 2031.

"(B) ANNUAL ADJUSTMENT.—For each of fiscal years 2025 through 2031, the amount authorized to be appropriated under subparagraph (A) shall be annually adjusted to reflect widely available engineering cost indices applicable to relevant construction activities.

"(C) NONREIMBURSABLE FUNDS.—Amounts made available pursuant to subparagraph (A)";

(B) in paragraph (2), by striking "Program for Endangered Fish Species in the Upper Colorado River Basin shall expire in fiscal year 2024" and inserting "Programs shall expire in fiscal year 2031"; and

(C) by striking paragraph (3);

(2) by striking subsections (b) and (c) and inserting the following:

"(b) NON-FEDERAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO CAPITAL PROJECTS.—The Secretary, acting through the Bureau of Reclamation, may accept contributed funds, interests in land and water, or other contributions from the Upper Division States, political subdivisions of the Upper Division States, or individuals, entities, or organizations within the Upper Division States, pursuant to agreements that provide for the contributions to be used for capital projects costs.";

(3) by redesignating subsections (d) through (j) as subsections (c) through (i), respectively;

(4) in subsection (c) (as so redesignated)—

(A) in paragraph (1)(A), by striking "\$10,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2020 through 2024" and inserting "\$80,000,000 for the period of fiscal years 2024 through 2031";

(B) in paragraph (2)—

(i) in the first sentence, by striking "\$4,000,000 per year" and inserting "\$52,914,285 for the period of fiscal years 2024 through 2031";

(ii) in the second sentence—

(I) by inserting "Basin" after "San Juan River"; and

(II) by striking "\$2,000,000 per year" and inserting "\$27,085,715 for the period of fiscal years 2024 through 2031"; and

(iii) in the third sentence, by striking "in fiscal years commencing after the enactment of this Act" and inserting "for fiscal year 2024 and each fiscal year thereafter"; and

(C) by striking paragraph (3) and inserting the following:

"(3) FEDERAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO ANNUAL BASE FUNDING.—