

Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Tom McClintock, Chairman

Hearing Memorandum

November 13, 2017

To: All Subcommittee on Federal Lands Members

From: Majority Staff – Brandon Miller
Subcommittee on Federal Lands, (x6-7736)

Hearing: Legislative hearing on **H.R. 3979 (Rep. Hakeem Jeffries)**, To amend the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 to reauthorize the volunteer services, community partnership, and refuge education programs of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and for other purposes.
November 15, 2017; 10:30AM; 1334 Longworth HOB

Summary of the Bill

H.R.3979 (Rep. Hakeem Jeffries), introduced October 5, 2017, the “Keep America’s Refuges Operational Act” reauthorizes the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer, Community Partnership, and Education Programs at \$2 million per year for fiscal years 2018 through 2022.

Invited Witness

Ms. Sue Masica
Acting Deputy Director for Operations
National Park Service
Washington, DC

Mr. Dan Ross
Virginia State Chairman
Ducks Unlimited
Spotsylvania, VA

Background

History

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has 566 total National Wildlife Refuges. 462 of these are open to the public, and of those 462, 393 refuges have volunteer programs. This includes wildlife refuges, fish hatcheries, wetland management districts, regional offices, and ecological services offices. These programs facilitate over 40,000 volunteers who contribute

more than 1.3 million hours each year providing assistance and support to U.S. Refuges. FWS estimates that these programs provide a labor value of over \$30 million.¹

Volunteers perform a wide variety of tasks to assist with refuge operations. Examples of these tasks include habitat improvement projects, laboratory research assistance, leading refuge tours, fish and wildlife population surveys, as well as many other projects.² All of these tasks help the FWS more efficiently fulfill its mission while also providing an opportunity for individuals and groups to contribute to the fish and wildlife preservation and protection.

The volunteer programs are authorized through the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer and Community Partnerships Enhancement Act of 1998 (Enhancement Act; P.L. 105-242), which amended the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. 742f) to promote volunteer programs, community partnerships, and educational activities for the benefit of National Wildlife Refuges. This statutory authority was reauthorized by the National Wildlife Refuge Volunteer Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-327), which authorized appropriations of \$2,000,000 for each fiscal year 2004 through 2009 for these activities. In turn, the National Wildlife Refuge Volunteer Improvement Act of 2011 (P.L. 111-357) reauthorized appropriations for fiscal years 2011 through 2014.³ In the last 2 fiscal years these programs have been appropriated \$2 million.⁴

Need for Legislation

H.R. 3979 reauthorizes a cost-efficient resource that helps the FWS fulfil its mission to protect and preserve the nation's fish and wildlife. The volunteer programs are very popular with recreationists throughout the country, with more applications than there are presently volunteer slots. This legislation has broad support from several recreation and conservation organizations as well as bipartisan support. A previous iteration of this bill in the 113th Congress passed out of the Natural Resources Committee with unanimous consent and was then passed out of the House under Suspension of the Rules by a voice vote.⁵

Support for the Legislation

The American Bird Conservancy
American Fisheries Society
American Hiking Society
American Sportfishing Association
Boy Scouts of America
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
Izaak Walton League of America
Marine Conservation Institute
National Audubon Society
National Wildlife Federation

¹ "Volunteer Program Stats" provided courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on November 8, 2017, to Natural Resources Committee.

² U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Volunteers." <https://www.fws.gov/volunteers/index.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ H.R. 1300, 113th Congress

National Wildlife Refuge Association
The Corps Network
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited

Cost

A Congressional Budget Office cost estimate has not yet been completed for this bill.

Administration Position

The Administration's position on H.R. 3979 is unknown at this time.