

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4949

To require the Secretary of Commerce to establish a grant program to facilitate the training and employment of veterans for certain conservation activities, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 26, 2023

Mr. SOTO (for himself, Mr. GRAVES of Louisiana, Mrs. PELTOLA, Mr. HUFFMAN, Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN, Ms. BONAMICI, and Mrs. LUNA) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Commerce to establish a grant program to facilitate the training and employment of veterans for certain conservation activities, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Don Young Veterans
5 Advancing Conservation Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) Veterans are among the greatest assets of
2 the United States.

3 (2) Veterans are highly skilled and trained indi-
4 viduals whose mission is to protect their commu-
5 nities.

6 (3) Studies show that community-focused
7 growth and engagement assists veterans with mental
8 health and combat-related trauma.

9 (4) SCUBA diving has been found to help im-
10 prove mental, physical, and emotional health and
11 has been specifically linked to improvement in the
12 symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

13 **SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE VETERANS ADVANC-**
14 **ING CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM.**

15 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 120 days after
16 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall
17 establish a program, to be known as the “Veterans Ad-
18 vancing Conservation Grant Program”, under which the
19 Secretary may award grants, on a competitive basis, to
20 nonprofit organizations that train or employ veterans to
21 conduct underwater marine and coastal conservation ac-
22 tivities.

23 (b) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—

24 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may award
25 grants under this section to nonprofit organizations

1 that train or employ veterans to conduct activities
2 described in subsection (a).

3 (2) APPLICATIONS.—To be eligible to receive a
4 grant under this section, an organization shall sub-
5 mit to the Secretary an application in such form, at
6 such time, and containing such information as the
7 Secretary determines appropriate.

8 (c) USE OF FUNDS.—An organization awarded a
9 grant under this section may use grant funds to train or
10 employ veterans to conduct activities described in sub-
11 section (a), which may include—

- 12 (1) response to coral disease;
- 13 (2) restoration and rehabilitation of coral;
- 14 (3) eradication of invasive species;
- 15 (4) removal of marine debris;
- 16 (5) rescue of marine mammals and reptiles;
- 17 (6) scientific research and development relating
18 to such activities;
- 19 (7) tagging of sharks and other marine animals;
- 20 (8) mapping of shipwrecks;
- 21 (9) underwater survey work;
- 22 (10) hurricane recovery; and
- 23 (11) coastal restoration.

1 (d) COORDINATION.—In carrying out this section, the
2 Secretary shall coordinate with the Secretary of the Inte-
3 rior.

4 (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—Of funds
5 otherwise appropriated to the Secretary, the Secretary is
6 authorized to make available not more than the following
7 amounts to carry out this section:

8 (1) \$1,000,000 for fiscal year 2024.

9 (2) \$1,200,000 for fiscal year 2025.

10 (3) \$1,400,000 for fiscal year 2026.

11 (4) \$1,600,000 for fiscal year 2027.

12 (5) \$1,800,000 for fiscal year 2028.

13 (f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

14 (1) NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION.—The term
15 “nonprofit organization” means an organization de-
16 scribed in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue
17 Code of 1986 and exempt from taxation under
18 501(a) of that Code.

19 (2) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
20 the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Ad-
21 ministrator of the National Oceanic and Atmos-
22 pheric Administration.

1 (3) VETERAN.—The term “veteran” has the
2 meaning given such term in section 101(2) of title
3 38, United States Code.

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