

Mr. Speaker, I thank Congresswoman BOEBERT for her leadership on this legislation. I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 1173, the previous question is ordered on the bill.

The question is on the engrossment and third reading of the bill.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed and read a third time, and was read the third time.

MOTION TO RECOMMIT

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have a motion to recommit at the desk.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Clerk will report the motion to recommit.

The Clerk read as follows:

Mr. Huffman of California moves to recommit the bill H.R. 764 to the Committee on Natural Resources.

The material previously referred to by Mr. HUFFMAN is as follows:

Mr. Huffman moves to recommit the bill H.R. 764 to the Committee on Natural Resources with instructions to report the same back to the House forthwith, with the following amendment:

Add at the end the following:

SEC. 4. EXCESSIVE WOLF LOSSES.

If, at any time, the Secretary of the Interior finds the unsustainable harvest of gray wolves or another factor has reduced the gray wolf population below recovery thresholds, the Secretary shall, not later than 7 days after the date on which the Secretary makes such finding, with respect to the gray wolf—

(1) issue an emergency regulation under section 4(b)(7) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1533(b)(7)) to temporarily restore Federal protections; and

(2) initiate a species status review.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XIX, the previous question is ordered on the motion to recommit.

The question is on the motion to recommit.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the yeas appeared to have it.

Mr. HUFFMAN. 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 question are postponed.

PROTECTING ACCESS FOR HUNTERS AND ANGLERS ACT OF 2023

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 1173, I call up the bill (H.R. 615) to prohibit the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture from prohibiting the use of lead ammunition or tackle on certain Federal land or water under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, and for other purposes, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 1173, the

amendment in the nature of a substitute recommended by the Committee on Natural Resources, printed in the bill, shall be considered as adopted, and the bill, as amended, is considered read.

The text of the bill, as amended, is as follows:

H.R. 615

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 “Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act of 2023”.

SEC. 2. PROTECTING ACCESS FOR HUNTERS AND ANGLERS ON FEDERAL LAND AND WATER.

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—Except as provided in section 20.21 or 20.108 of title 50, Code of Federal Regulations (as in effect on the date of enactment of this Act), and subsection (b), the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service or the Director of the Bureau of Land Management, and the Secretary of Agriculture, acting through the Chief of the Forest Service (referred to in this section as the “applicable Secretary”), may not—

(1) prohibit the use of lead ammunition or tackle on Federal land or water that is—

(A) under the jurisdiction of the applicable Secretary; and

(B) made available for hunting or fishing activities; or

(2) issue regulations relating to the level of lead in ammunition or tackle to be used on Federal land or water described in paragraph (1).

(b) *EXCEPTION.*—Subsection (a) shall not apply to a prohibition or regulations described in that subsection that are limited to a specific unit of Federal land or water, if the applicable Secretary determines that—

(1) a decline in wildlife population at the specific unit of Federal land or water is primarily caused by the use of lead in ammunition or tackle, based on the field data from the specific unit of Federal land or water; and

(2) the prohibition or regulations, as applicable, are—

(A) consistent with the law of the State in which the specific Federal land or water is located;

(B) consistent with an applicable policy of the fish and wildlife department of the State in which the specific Federal land or water is located; or

(C) approved by the applicable fish and wildlife department of the State in which the specific Federal land or water is located.

(c) *FEDERAL REGISTER NOTICE.*—The applicable Secretary shall include in a Federal Register notice with respect to any prohibition or regulations that meet the requirements of paragraphs (1) and (2) of subsection (b) an explanation of how the prohibition or regulations, as applicable, meet those requirements.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The bill, as amended, shall be debatable for 1 hour, equally divided and controlled by the chair and ranking minority member of the Committee on Natural Resources, or their respective designees.

The gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. HUFFMAN) each will control 30 minutes. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN).

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. 615.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 615, sponsored by my colleague, Congressman WITTMAN of Virginia.

This commonsense bill protects hunters' and anglers' ability to continue using cost-effective lead ammunition and fishing equipment in our National Wildlife Refuge System. At the same time, this legislation gives the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the flexibility to make targeted decisions on lead use in refuges based on sound, site-specific science and in coordination with State fish and wildlife agencies.

In the United States, sportsmen's and -women's participation is crucial to the success of wildlife conservation. The North American model of wildlife conservation operates on seven interdependent principles. Embedded in these principles are sound science, active management, and access to hunting and fishing. This model is a success story that is best characterized by the millions of dollars paid by hunters and anglers for wildlife conservation each year through excise taxes on the equipment that they use.

In fiscal year 2024, the Service apportioned nearly \$1 billion in receipts from excise taxes on firearms manufacturers. Of that, about \$800 million was targeted to wildlife restoration. Similarly, \$381 million was generated from excise taxes on fishing equipment for fish conservation.

Last year, after significant pushback from stakeholders and Members of Congress, the Fish and Wildlife Service denied a petition from far-left environmental groups to ban the use of lead ammunition and tackle throughout the system. However, the Fish and Wildlife Service is still pressing ahead with refuge-specific lead bans.

In its 2023–2024 hunting and sports fishing regulations for the system, the Service is banning the use of lead ammunition and tackle in eight refuges. It tries to lessen the blow by expanding access to hunting and fishing in three other refuges, but this expansion also includes a lead ban.

Why does any of this matter? It is about access and how the Service's actions are limiting access.

In 2021, the National Shooting Sports Foundation concluded that lead-free hunting ammunition is, on average, almost 25 percent more expensive than lead. Not only are alternative materials such as copper more expensive, but this administration also continues to push policies that prohibit mining such resources here in America.

Their lead bans will result in decreased hunting and fishing participation for all but the wealthy and a reduction in wildlife conservation and restoration funding.

Instead of regulating hunters and anglers off of our Federal lands, the Service should be working with State managers, conservation organizations, and sportsmen and -women. Where lead is shown to cause harm to wildlife populations, it should be addressed accordingly, but a systemwide ban or refuge-by-refuge bans where no scientific link can be made is the wrong approach and ultimately undermines wildlife conservation.

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

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Washington, DC, September 15, 2023.

Hon. BRUCE WESTERMAN,
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources,
Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: This letter confirms our mutual understanding regarding H.R. 615, the "Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act of 2023". Thank you for collaborating with the Committee on Agriculture on the matters within our jurisdiction.

The Committee on Agriculture will forego any further consideration of this bill. However, by foregoing consideration at this time, we do not waive any jurisdiction over any subject matter contained in this or similar legislation. The Committee on Agriculture also reserves the right to seek appointment of an appropriate number of conferees should it become necessary and ask that you support such a request.

We would appreciate a response to this letter confirming this understanding with respect to H.R. 615 and request a copy of our letters on this matter be published in the Congressional Record during Floor consideration.

Sincerely,

GLENN "GT" THOMPSON,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC, September 18, 2023.

Hon. GLENN "GT" THOMPSON,
Chairman, Committee on Agriculture, Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I write regarding H.R. 615, the "Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act of 2023," which was ordered reported by the Committee on Natural Resources on June 21, 2023.

I recognize that the bill contains provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Agriculture and appreciate your willingness to forgo any further consideration of the bill. I acknowledge that the Committee on Agriculture will not formally consider H.R. 615 and agree that the inaction of your Committee with respect to the bill does not waive any jurisdiction over the subject matter contained therein.

I am pleased to support your request to name members of the Committee on Agriculture to any conference committee to consider such provisions. I will ensure that our exchange of letters is included in the Congressional Record during floor consideration of the bill. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation.

Sincerely,

BRUCE WESTERMAN,
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to H.R. 615, a bill that incorrectly claims

in its title that recreation access is threatened by efforts to protect wildlife from lead poisoning. Instead, this legislation could actually reduce the areas open to our sportsmen and -women because it is a wrongheaded attempt to take away a commonsense tool for allowing sustainable hunting and fishing.

Specifically, this bill would ban the Fish and Wildlife Service, the BLM, and the Forest Service from prohibiting or regulating the use of lead ammunition or tackle on Federal lands that are made available for hunting and fishing.

Lead regulations and bans actually make sense. When wildlife forage for food, they inadvertently consume spent shot or tackle that is left in the environment. This lead accumulates in animal tissue, where it causes neurological and immune system impairments and anemia, slowly poisoning these animals until they die. When one animal dies of lead poisoning, the lead accumulated in its tissue then becomes a hazard to scavenging animals.

We see this in species like the bald eagle and the California condor. In fact, scientific evidence shows that over 130 animal species, including humans, have been exposed to or killed by lead shot or ammunition, whether directly or by ingesting prey poisoned with lead.

Twenty million birds and other animals die each year from lead poisoning. We know lead is a neurotoxin, and the science is clear that many species are negatively impacted. In a study from the USGS, almost half of all examined bald eagles exhibited symptoms of lead toxicity. The California condor was nearly driven to extinction by lead poisoning, leading the Republican Governor of my State, California, at the time to implement lead ammunition restrictions in condor habitat.

Some States, such as Maine, Vermont, and California, have instituted restrictions on lead ammunition in fishing tackle. This bill could make it extremely difficult for Federal land managers in those States to simply carry out those same logical, beneficial restrictions on Federal lands.

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Banning lead products when we know they pose harm is not a radical idea. We have banned lead in paint, pipes, and household items because we know lead poisoning is a serious problem. Scientists are continuing to discover further evidence of its harm to people and wildlife.

There are ample alternatives to lead-based tackle and ammo at virtually the same price. People already can and do use these alternatives in areas where lead is banned. No one is losing access due to lead bans, but our wildlife and habitats are safer because of them. It is a win-win.

Why are Republicans pushing this bill? Well, I can't say for sure, but I can say that at the hearing on this bill,

Republican Members and witnesses didn't have much to say about lead bans causing problems for hunters and fishers. What my colleagues aired was their ideological opposition to anything that regulates firearms in any context for any reason, including ammunition.

Let's not pretend that this bill is about solving a problem for sportsmen and -women. This bill would likely result in closures of hunting and fishing areas.

The National Wildlife Refuge System's mission is to conserve, manage, and restore wildlife and their habitats for future generations. In the face of a changing climate, habitat loss, disease, and other pressures, our wildlife increasingly rely on the protections and resources of the refuge network. That is why, by law, refuges cannot be open for hunting or fishing if doing so is incompatible with the purpose of the refuge. Additionally, many of these refuges were established to recover and conserve endangered species.

Guess what happens if refuge managers can no longer restrict lead ammo and tackle? They are going to face a dilemma. What happens when they are faced with a decision to open an area to hunting and fishing or not open it? If they are concerned that lead-based gear could jeopardize endangered or threatened species, then the most likely outcome will be to not allow any hunting. They will have no choice but to close off these habitats to hunting and fishing.

My colleagues have to think through the consequences of poorly written legislation like this. Committee Democrats have been pointing this out for months, but House Republicans are forging ahead at full speed.

Preventing the Federal management of pollutants does nothing to protect or even maintain access, and it is in direct opposition to the conservation goals shared by sportsmen and -women and Federal land managers.

The hearing on this bill shed a lot of light for me on the thinking behind it. When it comes to guns, and now ammo, any type of restriction is too much for Republican ideology, even if it means closing off hunting areas for actual gun users.

That is where we are, and that is why Republicans refuse to move forward on commonsense gun safety regulations, assault weapon bans, and other things that the American people overwhelmingly support.

That is the problem. House Republicans need to listen to the people instead of pushing an ideological agenda that Americans are not asking for. The entire House schedule this week misses the mark. It elevates rightwing ideology over the actual needs of the American people. It tells us once again what the GOP has devolved to. Unfortunately, it stands for guns, oil, and polluters.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to reject this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The rule this administration put out has absolutely nothing to do with protecting wildlife, wildlife conservation, or protecting human health. As the gentleman alluded to, I believe this bill probably is more aimed at restricting the sale of ammunition and any kind of attack Democrats can take on our Second Amendment rights.

This bill will hurt conservation. It is senseless. It is based on no facts. The Fish and Wildlife Service can't produce a document to show why they should ban lead ammunition or lead fishing tackle. It is simply another move by an administration that wants to write the law instead of letting Congress write the laws and then enforce the laws.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WITTMAN), the sponsor of the legislation.

Mr. WITTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a lifelong hunter and recreational fisherman in support of my bill, H.R. 615, the Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act.

Mr. Speaker, our hunters and anglers are really the backbone of this Nation. They are the contributors that put a tremendous amount of resources into protecting the resources that we all enjoy. Why would we want to restrict their access?

America is blessed with an abundance of natural resources. These refugees belong to the American people. Why wouldn't we want them to use them to the maximum utility for everybody, not just for a small group that decides that they want to go to court?

The Trump administration opened up 2.3 million acres of the refuge system for the owners of the system. That makes some sense, doesn't it? In response, anti-fishing and hunting groups sued, claiming lead ammunition and tackle would negatively impact endangered species in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Certainly, there are limited instances where one can show an association there, but not carte blanche. We wouldn't just say we are going to close the whole thing down because of some isolated incidents.

In 2022, the Biden administration reached a settlement and pretty much said they were going to go forward with the lead ban for fishing tackle and ammunition.

For those who said it is not a big deal because other materials can be substituted at kind of the same price, they are people who have never gone to hunt and fish before and don't know what the heck they are talking about. If you take a lead sinker that you are going to now replace with tungsten, you have to know by common sense tungsten is going to cost significantly more than lead.

Additionally, you have families suffering through Bidenomics, suffering from higher fuel prices when they go to

the pump today and are paying almost \$4 a gallon, when they are paying more for a loaf of bread and a dozen eggs. Now, you say, by the way, we are going to have government charge you more for something that can be avoided.

Then, my colleagues say Members are making it difficult for the Feds to regulate. Isn't that our job? Shouldn't we make sure our Federal Government is doing its due diligence in regulating? No, we want to have a side that says: We want more costs to the American people. We don't even want them to enjoy their pastimes. We want them to suffer at the pump. We want them to suffer at the grocery store. Also, now we want to make them suffer by not being able to enjoy the lands that belong to them.

How ironic is that? Add more suffering on more suffering on more suffering. Lord forbid, we don't want to make it difficult for government to regulate.

Where are we? This is an alternate universe.

We want to make sure that we are ensuring that these lands are accessible to the people who own them. These are sportsmen that put a tremendous amount of money into the system. The Duck Stamp Act, the Pittman-Robertson Act, and the Dingell-Johnson Act put millions and millions of dollars into the system every year. Hundreds of anglers help protect these assets. They protect the natural resources on these public lands.

I want to make sure that we are able to support them, make sure that we don't add to the cost of them being able to enjoy those lands. This bill ensures that Federal agencies have to do their due diligence.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. WITTMAN. It doesn't stop them from limiting lead use on these properties, but it ensures that they have to use the science. They have to demonstrate, in these instances, in these specific situations, that they have the science behind limiting lead use, not just carte blanche bans.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has again expired.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield an additional 30 seconds to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WITTMAN).

Mr. WITTMAN. I want to make sure the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture have to do their due diligence to show that there is indeed a scientific purpose behind these lead restrictions. We want to make sure we are effectively managing our lands and our natural resources in ways that keep in mind the American citizen.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, just a reality check. No one has lost hunting or angling access because of lead ammunition or tackle restrictions. That has not happened, but if this management tool is taken away from fish and

wildlife managers, and lead pollution and lead poisoning is allowed to continue to build up, my colleagues will start to see the loss of that access.

This ready-shoot-aim approach to wildlife management is actually going to hurt the people who the gentleman says he wants to protect.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 6 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mrs. DINGELL).

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I am a proud member of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus. In fact, I am a past co-chair. I am dedicated to protecting and expanding access to hunting and fishing opportunities throughout the United States.

Sportsmen and -women are some of the country's leading conservationists, and I applaud their work to protect lands and wildlife for current and future generations. However, this bill before us today is not a conservation bill. In fact, it drives a wedge in the deep partnerships between sportsmen and -women and Federal land managers who have worked together for decades to identify strategies to allow hunting and fishing in ethical ways that help fish and wildlife populations thrive.

Federal land managers have the authority and the mission to manage their lands in a way that contributes to the conservation of wildlife, and they must ensure that any actions that occur on the lands that they manage do not cause jeopardy to endangered or threatened species.

This bill conflicts with the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, and other land management laws by prohibiting any regulation of lead ammunition or tackle, even when scientific analysis conducted under those laws determines that lead is causing a decline in a population of animals or is not compatible with the uses of the wildlife refuge.

Particularly for the national wildlife refuges, this bill is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of how hunting and fishing are managed on wildlife refuges. Under the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, the refuges are closed to hunting and fishing until they are opened by the annual hunt-fish regulations the Fish and Wildlife Service publishes. In those regulations, the Fish and Wildlife Service identifies the places; the types of hunting and fishing available; the restrictions, such as no hunting or fishing at night, no motorized boats, et cetera; and the times those opportunities are available.

This regulation is published after careful analysis of whether such actions are compatible with the goals and the purposes of each refuge. The Fish and Wildlife Service also assesses if the regulation has any impacts under the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and other laws.

If we play out this bill before us today, one can easily imagine scenarios

where the best-available science under the Endangered Species Act shows that hunting or fishing with lead ammunition or tackle will lead to a decline in the listed species. At that point, the Fish and Wildlife Service has a choice to make: Do they allow hunting or fishing with lead ammunition or tackle in violation of the Endangered Species Act, or do they close off that area to hunting and fishing?

They have already been sued for allowing the use of lead in violation of the ESA. They would simply avoid lawsuits by keeping that area closed to future hunting and fishing.

This bill is going to be counterproductive to the goals of the sponsors. It is likely that it will result in less lands available for hunting and fishing, limiting access to sportsmen and -women.

Mr. Speaker, for this reason, at the appropriate time, I will offer a motion to recommit this bill back to committee. If the House Rules permitted, I would have offered the motion with an important amendment to this bill. This amendment would ensure that sportsmen and -women won't be harmed by reduced access to hunting and fishing if this bill is enacted by tasking the Fish and Wildlife Service and its partners with analyzing the likely outcomes of this legislation and assessing whether they would have to close areas to hunting and fishing to comply with this bill and other laws, such as the Endangered Species Act and the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act.

It is common sense to assess the possible outcomes of legislation before it takes effect. In this case, Democrats have been asking these difficult questions with little response from the Republicans.

Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to insert the text of this amendment into the RECORD immediately prior to the vote on the motion to recommit.

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

There was no objection.

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I hope my colleagues will join me in voting for the motion to recommit.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I serve as the co-chair of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus, and I would like to point out that not only does the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation endorse this legislation, but so do organizations such as the Mule Deer Foundation, the American Sportfishing Association, Ducks Unlimited, and Delta Waterfowl. The who's who of sportsmen and -women organizations support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD this list of endorsements.

OCTOBER 27, 2022.

COSPONSOR REQUEST: PROTECTING ACCESS FOR HUNTERS AND ANGLERS ACT

DEAR CONGRESSIONAL SPORTSMEN'S CAUCUS MEMBER: The undersigned organizations, representing millions of hunters, anglers, wild-

life professionals, and outdoor enthusiasts are writing to express our support for the *Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act* (S. 4940/H.R. 9088). Introduced by Senator Steve Daines with a companion bill from Representatives Rob Wittman and Bruce Westerman, this legislation would prohibit the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior from prohibiting the use of lead ammunition or tackle on certain Federal lands and waters absent field data delineating a science-based nexus to a wildlife species population decline. Overly broad and arbitrary ammunition and tackle bans have severe and unnecessary detrimental impacts on the economy while also serving as a hinderance to fish and wildlife conservation programs and projects. *To that end, we are united in respectfully requesting that you join as a cosponsor of this important legislation.*

At the outset, it is important to note that with few exceptions, fish and wildlife are successfully managed at the population level. Additionally, with the exception of Federal Trust Species and certain other species, fish and wildlife management decisions are primarily driven by state fish and wildlife agencies. With those considerations in mind, in the very rare occurrences that science-based field data clearly delineates a causal nexus between traditional ammunition or tackle and changes in fish or wildlife population health, state fish and wildlife agencies already have the ability to regulate the use of those to both achieve conservation objectives and minimize impacts to anglers and hunters.

That said, we do not believe wildlife management decisions should be driven or decided by political motivations, litigation, at the ballot box or by anyone other than the applicable fish and wildlife department of the State in which the specific Federal land or water is located. Furthermore, we maintain that any restrictions on the use of lead ammunition and tackle on federal lands and waters by a federal agency must have the support of the respective state fish and wildlife agency, which is required by the *Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act*. Simply put, this legislation reaffirms state fish and wildlife management authority.

In many cases, alternatives to lead ammunition and tackle that deliver similar performance at a comparable cost simply do not exist. Therefore, overly broad and arbitrary bans on traditional ammunition and tackle serve as a disincentive to the recruitment, retention and reactivation of hunters and anglers and, as a result, have significant negative economic consequences for sportsmen and women and local and regional economies. In addition, these bans result in decreases to the excise taxes that hunters and anglers voluntarily imposed on ammunition and fishing tackle as part of the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts, both of which provide the lion's share of funding for state fish and wildlife conservation, research, public access to natural resources and other important programs that promote hunting and fishing and sustainable populations of fish and wildlife species.

Recently, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published a final rule that, while expanding access to hunting and fishing opportunities at certain wildlife refuges, also seeks to phase out the use of traditional lead ammunition and fishing tackle. We are disappointed to see the lack of a science-based justification for the arbitrary limitation on the use of lead ammunition and tackle. This rule does not recognize state fish and wildlife as the primary managers of our nation's fish and wildlife. Concurrently, litigation initiated by animal rights interests is pending against a similar, previous rule to expand hunting and fishing

access on national wildlife refuges alleging that the additional use of lead ammunition and tackle will harm wildlife species at those refuges. However, those allegations are not substantiated by science.

The litigation not only lacks scientific justification, but it is entirely without legal merit. In light of the timing of this litigation, we are concerned the USFWS has engaged in settlement negotiations with the litigants. Despite strong opposition from many of the undersigned, we believe the USFWS continues conversations with the plaintiff. Furthermore, we are concerned that an overly broad, onerous and unnecessary ban on the use of traditional ammunition and tackle in the National Wildlife Refuge System could be forthcoming.

For these reasons, we strongly support the *Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act* (S. 4940/H.R. 9088) and encourage you to serve as a cosponsor of this vital legislation.

Thank you for your leadership and continued service on behalf of America's outdoor heritage.

Sincerely,
American Catfishing Association, American Sportfishing Association, Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.), BoatU.S., Boone and Crockett Club, California Waterfowl Association, Coastal Conservation Association, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports, Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, International Game Fish Association, Major League Fishing, Marine Retailers Association of the Americas, Mule Deer Foundation, National Professional Anglers Association, National Rifle Association, National Shooting Sports Foundation, Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, Pope & Young Club, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, The Bass Federation, Inc., The Walleye Federation, LLC, Whitetails Unlimited, Wildlife Mississippi.

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Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. CARTER). Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of H.R. 615, the *Protecting Access For Hunters and Anglers Act* of 2023 led by my friend, Mr. WITTMAN of Virginia.

In 2022, the National Fish and Wildlife Service proposed to ban lead ammunition and tackle in seven National Wildlife Refuges by 2027.

To put it plainly, this rule makes no sense whatsoever.

It is simply another example of the Biden administration giving in to radical environmentalists who do not hunt nor fish in our national refuges.

America's hunters and anglers contribute over a billion dollars a year in conservation funding via taxes on outdoor equipment like ammunition and tackle.

On top of that, lead products are significantly cheaper than their lead-free counterparts, often costing 25 percent more.

With prices rising on everything—thanks to Bidenomics—from gasoline to fishing tackle, why is it that this administration tries to limit access to wildlife refuges and jeopardize critical wildlife funding dollars? Hunters and anglers are the original conservationists, and without regulation based on

science, this rule does nothing but hurt the environment it is attempting to protect.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

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

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. RUTHERFORD).

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arkansas for yielding and I thank my colleague from Virginia for introducing this bill, the Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act of 2023.

This is a poorly decided agreement on a court case where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as you just heard, was actually sued by the Center for Biological Diversity. They sued the Department of the Interior, and the agreement was: We will just throw them seven of our national wildlife refuges to get them to go away. That is not the best science. It is not based on science at all. In fact, it is best regulated by the States.

Our colleague across the aisle even said some States have actually shut down areas because of lead issues. That is what all of these States should be doing—managing these resources themselves. It should not be from some bureaucrat in Washington, D.C., trying to settle a lawsuit and throwing away people's rights to enjoy the land.

Millions of Americans, including myself, are avid outdoorsmen and -women who greatly enjoy hunting and fishing, and we depend on reliable access to these public lands and waters. That is why a ban on the cost-effective traditional lead ammo and tackle is so concerning. It will affect hunters, it will affect recreational and commercial anglers, and it will simply increase the cost which will reduce the participation by those who enjoy these two American pastimes.

As you heard earlier from my good friend from Georgia, it is a 25 percent higher cost for the nonleaded ammo versus the traditional lead ammo. When you start cutting that, you are going to cut the excise tax that actually provides money for wildlife conservation here in America.

States already have the ability, as I mentioned earlier, to regulate lands for conservation purposes. Instead of these Federal mandates we should be leaning on the States that know an area's conservation needs better than anyone else.

State-driven, public-private partnerships are much better than top-down Federal mandates that do not take into consideration site-specific science necessary to make these decisions.

In fact, the Center for Biological Diversity in their suit said that lead hunting and fishing on these lands might or could create lead issues. They used words like "could" or "might." There is no science there, Mr. Speaker. This is strictly a top-down land grab.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on this important bill. We

must protect our hunting and fishing in our national wildlife refuges. Let's leave it to the States and local authorities to decide what can and can't be used on public lands and keep the Biden administration's Green New Deal agenda out of these great American pastimes.

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

I appreciate the gentleman pointing out some important facts about how this rule came to be from this administration that is anything but transparent. It is an administration that rejects any kind of oversight. I couldn't even start to tell you how much information they are behind on sending to the committee that we have requested just so we can do oversight, but I can imagine how this meeting probably went down.

The radical environmental groups go over to the administration to have a meeting and the administration says, well, there are no facts, no science, nothing that supports what you are wanting to do. However, wink, wink, if you were to sue us and we went to court, then we could settle that and maybe we will give you a half dozen to a dozen refuges that we will ban lead on and that will make their friends happy. I think that is exactly what happened, and that is why we are here today with a bill in Congress to say you can't do that.

Enough is enough. Manage these lands for the public, not for your special interest radical environmental groups. I think Congress has to take the lead on this.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I am continually puzzled by the things that my friends across the aisle embrace and seem to hold sacred from toilets that require five gallons for every flush, to inefficient incandescent lightbulbs that even the market and consumers want nothing to do with, and, of course, today, we hear this love affair with lead.

I think it is really important to remember that the science is really clear. Lead is harmful to both humans and wildlife. It causes neurological, behavioral, muscular, and cognitive impairment. The Center for Disease Control states there is no acceptable amount of lead exposure. None.

In my home State of California and many other places, we have almost lost iconic species, the California condor in our case, because of lead ammunition and the way it bioaccumulates in the environment, especially for scavengers like the condor.

We cannot save the condor, even though we have had a very successful reintroduction. There are signs we could recover this species, but we can't do it if we have this stubborn rule that restrictions on lead ammunition are off the table because of Republican ideology.

Look, we have hundreds of studies documenting that lead ammo and tackle cause both acute and chronic lead poisoning. Its impact on hundreds of species and millions of individuals is not even debatable. Yet this bill requires a completely unworkable standard for fish and wildlife managers to even consider restricting lead.

It would require the Secretary to determine that: a decline in wildlife population at the specific unit of Federal land or water, they would have to determine that lead is the primary cause of that decline, and they would have to use field data from that specific unit of Federal land or water.

This is a completely unworkable standard. That is why the National Wildlife Refuge Association has pointed out that it is functionally impossible.

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

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, a lot of points have been made about this bill, but I think the one that needs discussion in my closing remarks is the fact that this bill seems to have achieved the unthinkable: It is bad for literally everyone.

It is bad for wildlife as it restricts land managers' ability to limit harmful lead pollution in the environment. It conflicts with the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and land management laws, such as the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act.

It is bad for States. It is unclear whether Federal land managers could even carry out State laws that ban the use of certain types of lead ammunition or tackle on neighboring Federal lands.

It is even bad for hunters and anglers who will be left with less land and water available for hunting and fishing because of this wrongheaded legislation.

You might think that this bill would be a boon for the gun industry, but even there, it is hard to see how less land available for hunting would somehow lead to greater gun and ammunition sales.

Most hunters and anglers want to contribute to improving wildlife conservation in this country, but this bill makes their efforts more difficult.

At the end of the day, the only thing that this bill does is score a few cheap political points by yet again villainizing the big bad government for doing its job—in this case, for carrying out key wildlife conservation laws and keeping hunting areas open.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to reject H.R. 615, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, hunters and anglers are the backbone of American wildlife conservation efforts and are invested in the long-term health of wildlife.

It is important that Congress comes to their defense against ideologically driven and unscientific decisions that limit access to our public lands.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if the big bad government was really basing their actions on science, why did they randomly pick seven wildlife refuges? Why didn't they propose this across the Nation?

Again, this is a classic sue and settle. They got sued by their friends in the radical environmental groups, and they decided to settle and give them a little consolation prize of a few wildlife refuges, thinking we might just turn our backs and say it was just a few refuges. They are just giving a little gift to their friends in the radical environmental movement. Let's go on and work on something else, but you have to stop these actions where they start.

To be clear, this bill doesn't prevent the Federal Government from banning the use of lead ammunition and tackle, but it does say that any ban must be supported by site-specific science showing that the use of lead is harming wildlife in that refuge.

It also requires that States be properly consulted when the Federal Government proposes to ban the use of lead. If some of my colleagues have an issue with that, they must ask themselves if they consider States to be partners in conserving wildlife or stakeholders who they can ignore.

I believe that a true partnership between States and Federal Government and wildlife conservation is the best path forward, and this bill is a step in that direction.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman WITTMAN for his leadership on this legislation. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 1173, the previous question is ordered on the bill, as amended.

The question is on the engrossment and third reading of the bill.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed and read a third time, and was read the third time.

MOTION TO RECOMMIT

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I have a motion to recommit at the desk.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Clerk will report the motion to recommit.

The Clerk read as follows:

Mrs. Dingell of Michigan moves to recommit the bill H.R. 615 to the Committee on Natural Resources.

The material previously referred to by Mrs. DINGELL is as follows:

Mrs. Dingell moves to recommit the bill H.R. 615 to the Committee on Natural Resources with instructions to report the same back to the House forthwith, with the following amendment:

Add at the end the following:

SEC. 3. DETERMINATION.

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, section 2 may not take effect until the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Secretary of Agriculture, acting through the Chief of the Forest Service, jointly determine, in consultation with Indian Tribes, in coordination with State wildlife agencies, and informed by the Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council, that the implementation of such section will not result in a decrease in public lands made available for hunting and fishing.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XIX, the previous question is ordered on the motion to recommit.

The question is on the motion to recommit.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the yeas appeared to have it.

Mrs. DINGELL. 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 question are postponed.

□ 1530

WESTERN ECONOMIC SECURITY TODAY ACT OF 2023

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 1173, I call up the bill (H.R. 3397) to require the Director of the Bureau of Land Management to withdraw a rule of the Bureau of Land Management relating to conservation and landscape health, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 1173, in lieu of the amendment in the nature of a substitute recommended by the Committee on Natural Resources, printed in the bill, an amendment in the nature of a substitute consisting of the text of Rules Committee Print 118-32 shall be considered as adopted, and the bill, as amended, is considered read.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3397

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 "Western Economic Security Today Act of 2024" or the "WEST Act of 2024".

SEC. 2. WITHDRAWAL OF BLM RULE.

The final rule based on the proposed rule of the Bureau of Land Management entitled "Conservation and Landscape Health" (88 Fed. Reg. 19583 (April 3, 2023)) shall have no force or effect.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The bill, as amended, shall be debatable for 1 hour, equally divided and controlled by the chair and ranking minority member of the Committee on Natural Resources or their respective designees.

The gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) and the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. NEGUSE) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN).

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 insert extraneous material on H.R. 3397.

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 today in support of Representative CURTIS' bill, H.R. 3397, the Western Economic Security Today Act, or WEST Act of 2024.

The WEST Act withdraws the flawed and illegal Conservation and Landscape Health Rule, which was finalized earlier this month by the Bureau of Land Management, or the BLM.

You may be asking, why is a rule focused on conservation and landscape health so bad. Well, it wouldn't be bad if that was what it was really focused on, but the name is very misleading.

This rule is a poorly concealed effort to lock up more lands to advance the Biden administration's radical 30x30 agenda. It has absolutely nothing to do with true conservation or improving the health of our landscapes.

Responsible uses of BLM lands are central to the Western way of life. This rule would fundamentally upend more than 50 years of land management practices across the West that rural communities have relied on for their livelihoods.

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, or FLPMA, the BLM is mandated to manage lands in accordance with multiple use and sustained yield. If responsible use and development of public lands are prohibited, family and small businesses, multi-generation ranches, local communities, and schools will suffer from a lack of economic development, access, and tax revenue.

This is more than just a Western issue. If you ate a hamburger this week or filled your car with gas, this rule affects you. This rule will severely impact the lives and wallets of every single American. Haven't we had enough of that already? Haven't we had enough of inflation and rising prices?

The finalized rule will broadly allow the BLM to lease lands under new and vaguely defined "restoration and mitigation leases" and change standards around land use decisions. The rule will elevate conservation as a use of our public lands. This is clearly contradictory with both the plain reading of FLPMA and Congress' intent.

Congress very clearly defined the principal or major uses of BLM lands to "include, and be limited to, domestic livestock grazing, fish and wildlife development and utilization, mineral exploration and production, rights-of-way, outdoor recreation, and timber