

Testimony of The Honorable Mark Steven Kirk

Before the House Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries and Oceans

September 14, 2006

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of H.R. 4953, the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act. The restoration of one of our nation's most precious natural resources is of critical importance, and I want to thank the Subcommittee for holding hearings on this legislation. I would also like to thank my colleague, Mr. Kildee of Michigan, for introducing the bill.

The Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act reauthorizes the Fish and Wildlife Service to issue \$20 million in annual grants to States and tribes for the enhancement, conservation and restoration of fish and wildlife habitats in the Great Lakes. For the first time, the Service would also be authorized to undertake regional projects to accomplish broader objectives. Since 1998, the Act funded 65 projects. \$3.3 million in federal funds and \$2.5 million in non-federal matching funds were directed toward these efforts. The Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act clearly draws vast participation from the Great Lakes communities in restoring this tremendous resource.

One project in my area of suburban Chicago helped stave off yet another foreign species invasion. More than 162 non-native aquatic species have already infiltrated the Great Lakes region, threatening the native ecosystem and causing an economic loss of \$5 billion in 2005 alone. Four species of Asian Carp have invaded the Illinois River, separated from the Great Lakes Basin only by the man-made Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. Should these carp enter the Great Lakes, scientists predict that they could become the dominant species due to their large size, rapid rate of reproduction and vast consumption abilities.

In 2002, a temporary electric dispersal barrier was constructed in the canal to determine the effectiveness of preventing species migration between the two bodies of water. Thanks to funding from the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act, a study was conducted which found that large steel barges disrupted the electric barrier, diminishing its effectiveness and allowing the invasive fish to pass through. These results were later used to improve the engineering design of the permanent barrier currently being constructed.

Without such grants authorized by the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act, we might never have found the flaw in the temporary barrier, wasting \$9.1 million on an ineffective permanent barrier. The research conducted with these grants provides insight into the myriad problems facing the Great Lakes and evaluates protective and restorative measures.

I would like to thank the subcommittee again for affording me this opportunity to speak on an issue of such importance not only for my district but also for the entire Great Lakes community. I urge my colleagues to support the reauthorization of this program so that we may continue with our mission to provide for the long-term sustainability of this treasured ecosystem.