



To: Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife Republican Staff; Kiel Weaver (Kiel.Weaver@mail.house.gov), Annick Miller (Annick.Miller@mail.house.gov), and Rob MacGregor (Robert.MacGregor@mail.house.gov)
Date: March 28, 2022
Subject: Legislative Hearing on H.R. 6427, H.R. 6734, and H.R. 7025

On **Tuesday, March 29, 2022, at 2:00 p.m. EDT, in person and via Cisco Webex**, the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife will hold a hybrid legislative hearing on three bills. Republican members are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in person from the hearing room.

Member offices are requested to notify Rob MacGregor no later than Monday, March 28, at 4:30 p.m. EDT, if their Member intends to participate in person in the hearing room or remotely from his/her laptop from another location. Submissions for the hearing record must be submitted through the Committee's electronic repository at HNRCDocs@mail.house.gov. Please contact David DeMarco (David.DeMarco@mail.house.gov) or Everett Winnick (EverettWinnick@mail.house.gov) should any technical difficulties arise.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- This hearing will focus on three U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)-related bills.
- H.R. 7025 (Grijalva, Westerman) is the result of a bipartisan investigation and an oversight hearing that uncovered the World Wildlife Foundation's use of federal taxpayer dollars to fund eco-paramilitary forces that committed human rights violations.¹ The legislation would bring accountability to the USFWS's international conservation grants program, which had funded WWF's activities.
- The two other bills, H.R. 6427 (Johnson, LA) and H.R. 6734 (Jeffries), aim to improve wildlife refuges through a boundary adjustment and supporting volunteer activities, respectively.

II. WITNESSES

Panel I – Members

- **Representative Mike Johnson**, Louisiana, 4th Congressional District [*testifying on H.R. 6427*]

¹<https://www.buzzfeed.com/tag/world-wildlife-fund>



Panel II – Federal

- **Mr. Stephen Guertin**, Deputy Director for Program Management and Policy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. [*testifying on all bills*]

Panel III – Non-Federal

- **Mr. Ed Penny**, Director of Public Policy, Ducks Unlimited Southern Region, Ridgeland, MS, *Republican Witness* [*testifying on H.R. 6427*]
- **Ms. Caroline Brouwer**, Vice President of Government Affairs, National Wildlife Refuge Association, Washington, DC [*testifying on H.R. 6427 and H.R. 6734*]
- **Mr. John Knox**, Professor of International Law, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC [*testifying on H.R. 7025*]
- **Ms. Joan Patterson**, President, Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates, Manassas, VA [*testifying on H.R. 6427 and H.R. 6734*]

III. BACKGROUND

H.R. 6427. (Rep. Mike Johnson, R-LA) Red River National Wildlife Refuge Boundary Modification Act

This bill would make a boundary adjustment to the Red River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in Louisiana. The 2000 law that created the Refuge capped the Refuge at a maximum of 50,000 acres of Federal lands, waters, and interests within the boundaries identified on a map entitled “Red River National Wildlife Refuge-Selection Area” and dated September 2000.² There were three purposes identified for the creation of the Refuge: to restore and conserve native plants and animals, to provide habitat for migratory birds, and to provide technical assistance to private land owners in the restoration of their lands for the benefit of fish and wildlife.³ Currently, the Refuge consists of 13,070 acres and is made up of four units, which provide habitat for waterfowl, wading birds, songbirds, and other native wildlife species.⁴

H.R. 6427 would modify the Refuge boundary by creating a new map entitled “Red River National Wildlife Refuge Acquisition Boundary” dated November 2021. The new boundary would allow USFWS to acquire a 3,300-acre parcel that was recently acquired by Ducks Unlimited. According to bill proponents, the parcel is needed to increase the waterfowl energy days for the Refuge. A waterfowl energy day is essentially the amount of food necessary to feed one bird for one day and it determines the number of waterfowl that can be sustained in a given area for a given amount of time. In 2020, the USFWS revised its objective for the Refuge, aiming for a total of 8.5 million waterfowl energy days.⁵ The current footprint of the Refuge only supports 2.8 million waterfowl energy days. This boundary modification to facilitate a

² Public Law 106-300.

³ *Id.*

⁴ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Red River Refuge, <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/red-river>; Restoring a Legacy at Red River National Wildlife Refuge: A Forestland Restoration Partnership between the US Fish and Wildlife Service and The Conservation Fund,

https://www.conservationfund.org/images/projects/files/Red_River_National_Wildlife_Refuge_Project_Implementation_Report_2019_PIR_and_Monitoring_Report.pdf.

⁵ <https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/DownloadFile/175323>



subsequent acquisition would support an additional 3 million on its own.⁶ The bill does not change the 50,000-acre statutory cap.

H.R. 6734. (Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, D-NY) Keep America’s Refuges Operational Act of 2022

This bill would reauthorize for five fiscal years several USFWS programs, including those related to volunteer services, community partnerships, donations and gifts, and education programs. The legislation accomplishes this by amending Section 7(g) of the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956⁷ by striking “2018 through 2022” and inserting “2022 through 2026”.

USFWS currently utilizes volunteers for tours, habitat restoration, plant and animal surveys, staffing refuge nature stores, and other activities.⁸ USFWS offers curriculum-based field trips as well as in- classroom seminars that are a part of the agency’s education program enhancement.⁹ USFWS also utilizes cooperative agreements with stakeholders in order to carry out certain fish and wildlife habitat projects.¹⁰

The bill has five cosponsors, including two Republicans: Rep. Robert Wittman (VA) and Rep. Garret Graves (LA).

H.R. 7025. (Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-AZ), Advancing Human Rights-Centered International Conservation Act of 2022

Since 2019, Committee Republican and Democrat staff have jointly investigated the World Wildlife Foundation’s use of federal taxpayer dollars to fund eco-paramilitary forces that committed human rights violations.¹¹ This investigation culminated with an oversight hearing on October 26, 2021. The memo for that hearing can be found [here](#).

The investigation and the oversight hearing led to the introduction of H.R. 7025, which would make several changes to the USFWS’s international conservation grant program. New requirements for USFWS would include an obligation to consider any credible information of human rights abuses prior to awarding international assistance. This requirement is nearly identical to requirements mandated to the Departments of State and Defense when issuing similar conservation grants. USFWS would comply with this requirement through performing a risk analysis and regular audits of international conservation grants. The bill would also implement a process for the USFWS to review allegations of human rights abuses and determine if allegations should be referred to Department of the Interior’s Office of Inspector General (OIG). The OIG would also have timeline requirements for reviewing documentation and initiating an investigation. Lastly, the bill would require annual reporting to Congress on any allegations the USFWS Director receives, how those allegations were resolved, and the allegations the Director referred to the OIG.

⁶ These numbers were calculated by the USFWS Southeast Region’s waterfowl ecologist and Red River National Wildlife Refuge staff using a Service-developed waterfowl energy model that calculates the energetic carrying capacity of different management practices and types (e.g., agricultural crops, bottomland forest, etc.).

⁷ [http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=\(title:16%20section:742f%20edition:prelim\)](http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=(title:16%20section:742f%20edition:prelim))

⁸ <https://www.fws.gov/volunteer-opportunity#:~:text=Opportunities%20for%20All%20Activity%20Levels,store%2C%20and%20so%20much%20more>

⁹ <https://www.fws.gov/story/education-programs>

¹⁰ <https://www.acf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/FWS-Cooperative-Agreement.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/tag/world-wildlife-fund>

H.R. 7025 also includes new requirements for grant recipients by making grant recipients responsible for the action of their subgrantees. This addresses an issue raised during the investigation, which found that grantees could continue to receive federal funding even if their subgrantees are using grant funds inappropriately. The bill would also require a grantee to report any credible allegation of a human rights abuse to the USFWS.

The bill has three cosponsors, including Committee Ranking Member Bruce Westerman (R-AR), Water, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-OR) and Water, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee Chairman Jared Huffman (D-CA).

IV. MAJOR PROVISIONS & ANALYSIS

[H.R. 6427](#) (Rep. Mike Johnson, R-LA)

- H.R. 6427 would modify the Red River National Wildlife Refuge boundary to allow USFWS to acquire a 3,300-acre parcel of land from a willing seller.

[H.R. 6734](#) (Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, D-NY)

- Would reauthorize for five fiscal years several USFWS programs, including those related to volunteer services, community partnerships, donations and gifts, and education programs.

[H.R. 7025](#) (Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-AZ)

- Would set new requirements for USFWS' international conservation grant program.
- Would ban USFWS from awarding grants to recipients and subgrantees that have committed, supported, or funded human rights violations.

V. COST

The bills have not received a Congressional Budget Office cost analysis.

VI. ADMINISTRATION POSITION

Unknown at this time.

VII. EFFECT ON CURRENT LAW (RAMSEYER)

[H.R. 5996](#)

[H.R. 6427](#)

[H.R. 6734](#)