

Huffman introduces bill to restore salmon habitats

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Congressman Jared Huffman (D-San Rafael), chair of the House Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife and co-Chair of the Congressional Wild Salmon Caucus, recently reintroduced legislation to identify, restore, and protect the most outstanding salmon rivers and watersheds in America, and to ensure funding needed to sustain thriving salmon populations.

“The ecological, cultural, and economic importance of salmon is hard to overstate; they support tens of thousands of jobs, sustain fishing communities, generate billions of dollars in economic activity, and provide a food source for millions of people. They also hold immense cultural significance for Tribes, like many in my district, who have fished for salmon since time immemorial,” said Huffman. “But this important species is facing numerous threats, and their populations are declining across the country. The Salmon FISH Act will identify critical centers of salmon abundance to ensure these areas receive the protection, support, and funding they need to continue to sustain the healthiest remaining salmon populations.”

Habitat degradation, pollution, dams, overharvesting, climate change, and other factors have caused salmon populations to decline across the country, severely impacting Tribes, fishermen, and the communities that depend on them.

The Salmon FISH Act would promote the vitality of salmon populations by:

Identifying the core centers of salmon abundance, productivity, and diversity as Salmon Conservation Areas and identifying areas of particularly pristine quality as Salmon Strongholds.

Building upon existing analysis such as that used in Essential Fish Habitat.

Ensuring actions of the federal government do not undermine the abundance of these areas.

Authorizing funding for a grant program focused on restoration and conservation of Salmon Conservation Areas and Salmon Strongholds.

Supporting current federal programs already focused on restoring and maintaining healthy watersheds.

What Supporters are Saying

“Salmon stronghold rivers and other critical salmon conservation areas contain the most important wild salmon populations left along the Pacific Rim,” said Guido Rahr, president and CEO of the Wild Salmon Center. “There is a lot at stake: salmon are critical for the health of our watersheds, clean water, jobs and food, and an inspiration to us all. By protecting the strongholds, we will ensure strong runs of wild salmon into the future.”

"It is so important for us to take special care of the remaining productive salmon habitat that we have left. If we don't, we'll stay on the path towards devastated fishing communities and Pacific ecosystems and, ultimately, salmon extinction," said Linda Behnken, executive director of the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association. "This intelligent and forward-looking bill would identify and apply special conservation status to the most important salmon habitat areas that remain and use existing public processes to ensure we keep them healthy."

“Pro-active solutions to protect and restore critical salmon habitat are few and far between. We are grateful for Congressman Huffman's legislation, which recognizes the value of salmon strongholds that our communities in Southeast Alaska rely on,” said Katie Riley, policy director of Sitka Conservation Society. “Salmon populations across the West Coast are facing immense challenges from development, climate change, ocean acidification, and warming waters. Congressman Huffman's legislation will help protect and restore salmon habitat on the Tongass National Forest, ensuring that our communities, our economies, and the Alaskan way of life are able to thrive for generations to come.

“Recreational fishing for west coast salmon provides tremendous economic, cultural and conservation benefits, yet these species face many challenges,” said Mike Leonard, the American Sportfishing Association’s vice president of government affairs. “The recreational fishing industry is grateful to Rep. Huffman for leading this effort to sustain salmon by focusing on their most significant watersheds. The

Salmon FISH Act will help maintain and enhance these aquatic ecosystems to the benefit of future salmon runs and the communities throughout the west coast that depend on them.”

"There could not be a more urgent time for the Salmon FISH Act than right now. Wild salmon populations throughout the West Coast and Alaska are showing clear signs of struggle due to climate change and habitat loss, and local communities are struggling as a result,” said Tim Bristol, executive director of SalmonState. “Investing in the restoration and protection of our country's most abundant salmon watersheds is one of the most important things that we can do to help ensure that our largest remaining wild salmon runs, like Alaska's Bristol Bay and Southeast Alaska's transboundary rivers, continue to nourish local Indigenous people, provide thousands of renewable jobs, and supply hundreds of millions of pounds of sustainable wild seafood. We applaud and thank Congressman Huffman for introducing the Salmon FISH Act and are eager to see it passed."

“CalWild strongly supports the Salmon FISH Act because it will provide desperately needed resources to management agencies and help guide conservation efforts for critically important fish species,” said Ryan Henson, senior policy director of CalWild. “We look forward to the protection of the last strongholds for these culturally and ecologically priceless animals. We thank Rep. Huffman for his continued outstanding conservation leadership.”

Original cosponsors of the bill include Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01), Emanuel Cleaver (MO-05), Mike Thompson (CA-05), and Alan Lowenthal (CA-47). The bill is endorsed by Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association, American Sportfishing Association, CalWild, SalmonState, Sitka Conservation Society, Sitka Salmon Shares, and Wild Salmon Center.