

WILDLIFE

Lawmakers try again with big conservation bill

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Reps. Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.). House of Representatives/Wikipedia

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A bipartisan team of lawmakers reintroduced a bill today that supporters call the most significant investment in wildlife and habitat conservation in a generation.

Backed by multiple conservation organizations, House members pitched the "Recovering America's Wildlife Act" as a dedicated funding stream to provide \$1.3 billion annually in support of state-level wildlife protection efforts.

"This is exactly the type of big, bold project we've got to have," said Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.).

Dingell again joined with Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.) in authoring the measure, which tracks a bill they previously introduced in December 2017 ([Greenwire](#), Dec. 18, 2017).

The new version also includes an additional \$97.5 million for tribal fish and wildlife managers to conserve species on tribal lands and waters.

Instead of the funding coming specifically from energy development revenues and fees, it would come from the general U.S. Treasury fund.

"I believe this is the most exciting public policy development in the conservation space that has happened in decades," Fortenberry said.

The earlier effort eventually secured 116 co-sponsors last Congress but only advanced as far as a subcommittee hearing in the then Republican-controlled House.

The bill has its backers with the Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife, which bills itself as representing the "outdoor recreation, retail and manufacturing sector, energy and automotive industries, private landowners, educational institutions [and] conservation organizations."

The alliance, in turn, follows up on the work of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish & Wildlife Resources, which recommended the funding program in 2016.

"State fish and wildlife agencies have a solid track record of accomplishing remarkable recovery and restoration successes," said Johnny Morris, founder and CEO of Bass Pro Shops. "However, enhanced funding is now needed to address today's fish and wildlife habitat management challenges."

Another challenge will be working out a potentially big difference with the Senate. Unlike the House proposal, last year's Senate version did not guarantee annual funding. Instead, the amount provided would be subject to annual appropriations by Congress ([E&E Daily](#), July 18, 2018).

The money would go to, among other purposes, new and existing conservation and restoration programs targeting "wildlife species of greatest conservation need ... and their habitats as determined by the appropriate state fish and wildlife department."

States would be required to provide at least 25% in matching funds, which could be either monetary or in-kind contributions originating from state, local or private entities.

"This could be one of the greatest conservation victories in the last half-century," said Collin O'Mara, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation.

The bill would supplement, but not replace, the existing Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act program, which collects about \$1 billion a year from excise taxes on sporting goods and related products and distributes it to states.

Correction: The story was corrected to properly explain sources of funding.

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