

FISHERIES

Don Young revives fight over Magnuson-Stevens

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(Left to right) Reps. Jared Huffman (D-Calif.) and Don Young (R-Alaska). Library of Congress

A year ago, Rep. Don Young convinced House lawmakers to approve a bill that would have made big changes to the nation's primary fisheries law, partly by giving state and local authorities more power in managing stocks.

While the plan went nowhere in the Senate, the Alaska Republican wants to revive the fight over the future of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. He introduced the [bill](#) again yesterday, saying this time he wants to make sure it "crosses the finish line and is ultimately signed into law."

Young, a 24-term veteran who helped write the original law in 1976, faces an uphill battle. With Republicans in charge last year, his bill passed largely along party lines and now faces much tougher odds under Democratic control.

Young's biggest obstacle is California Democratic Rep. Jared Huffman, who in January took over as chairman of the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife, the panel with oversight over the nation's fisheries.

On Wednesday, Huffman said he will introduce his own version of a Magnuson-Stevens reauthorization bill next spring, after conducting a "listening tour" at locations throughout the country ([E&E Daily](#), July 11).

The battle lines are clear.

Young said his bill "affords flexibility" by allowing management councils to base stock rebuilding timelines "on science rather than the one-size-fits-all approach." He said the bill would increase transparency in science and management by giving the public more say in developing management plans and requiring the Commerce secretary to work with fishermen and outside groups.

Huffman has long argued that Young's bill would gut federal protections for fish stocks. He said the law has worked well, crediting its annual catch limits and rebuilding time frames as "real pillars of Magnuson's success."

Young and Huffman have a history of friendly sniping.

At a 2017 subcommittee hearing, Huffman said the law had resulted in a decline of overfishing, which drew a quick response from Young: "I have to say to my good friend from California ... you don't want to catch any fish."

In the interview with E&E News in November, Huffman shot back: "I fish all the time — and I would bet you dinner anyplace in Washington that I fish a lot more than Don Young."

Young called the Alaska seafood industry "one of the primary drivers of our state economy" and said the law has helped fishermen, processors and coastal communities succeed. But he said it now needs updating to keep pace with evolving conditions.

Young said he will work to bring Democrats on board with his bill, H.R. 3697, the "Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act." He introduced the bill along with Rep. Jeff Van Drew (D-N.J.).

"Simply put, sustainability is not a partisan issue," Young said.

Advocates are gearing up for the fight.

"Mr. Young and Mr. Van Drew are well versed on the current Magnuson-Stevens bill and how it penalizes fishermen while stocks are healthy," said Jim Donofrio, executive director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance.

Meredith Moore, director of the fish conservation program at the environmental group Ocean Conservancy, called U.S. fishery management "a model for the world" and said Young's bill would "hurt fish and fisheries."

"Our fisheries are facing new challenges, like climate change, that underscore the importance of sustainable management," she said. "Now is the time to look forward, not backward."

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