

Teaming With Wildlife Funding Legislation

Implications for Fish Conservation and the NFHAP

What does the bill do?

S. 2670 directs \$350 million a year in funding to the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration subaccount of Pittman-Robertson. Funds are derived from existing federal oil and gas receipts and are not subject to appropriations.

What is the "Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Account" of Pittman-Robertson?

The WCR is the subaccount of P-R authorized by Congress in 2000 to provide funding in addition to traditional P-R and D-J programs. It is targeted at the implementation of state wildlife action plans and emphasizes the conservation of species that have unmet needs under P-R, D-J and other programs, including species that are not hunted or fished. [16 USC 669b(c)(1), 16 USC 669b(c)(3)].

Does the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Account" provide funding for fish?

Yes. Even though it is a subaccount of P-R, funds are available for fish and aquatic habitat conservation needs. As defined in the law, "the term 'wildlife' means any species of wild, free-ranging fauna *including fish*, and also fauna in captive breeding programs the object of which is to reintroduce individuals of a depleted indigenous species into previously occupied range" [16 USC 669a(4) emphasis added]. Note that the law also specifically includes water in the definition of "wildlife-restoration project [16 USC 669a(8)]. Note further that in the section of the bill directing that WCR funds should supplement and not replace existing activities, they specifically identify existing activities as encompassing both wildlife restoration and sport fish restoration accounts. [16 USC 669b(c)(1)]

WCR funds are specifically targeted at species of greatest conservation need as identified by the state wildlife action plans [16 USC 669b(c)(3)]. In every state, the wildlife action plans identified aquatic species of greatest conservation need that included fish and invertebrates, as well as extensive aquatic habitat conservation needs. If I read the law correctly, the WCR actually provides much needed breadth in applicability for fish conservation alongside traditional D-J, because traditional D-J specifically restricts fish restoration and management to species "which have material value in connection with sport or recreation." [16 USC 777a(1)]. I am not sure how FWS has implemented the program, but this suggests to me that without funding for WCR, there will be a lot of "nongame" fish species that will continue to be ineligible for conservation funding.

Finally, State Wildlife Grants provides a good model for how fish species will be addressed under WCR. States have spent a great deal of SWG money on conservation actions targeted at aquatic wildlife, including both fish and invertebrates, ranging from reintroductions to habitat improvements to basic inventory work. Fish have competed well for funding when SWG funding has been at a relatively low level. I can only imagine that if the funding were increased fivefold the attention to fish would also increase at least proportionally if not more.

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