

September 30, 2020

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senate
530 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski and Senator Whitehouse:

The undersigned recreational fishing, boating, hunting, and conservation organizations represent millions of anglers, hunters, and outdoor recreationists committed to the conservation and restoration of America's coastal and estuarine systems. We are writing in regard to the Blue Carbon for Our Planet Act (S. 3939) and to thank you for your leadership in advancing this important legislation.

With an aggressive land- and water-based strategy, [a recent study](#) shows the United States could mitigate a fifth of its carbon emissions through natural solutions. This is equivalent to removing emissions from all cars and trucks on U.S. roads today. Marine ecosystems – seagrasses, tidal marshes, mangroves, and estuaries – are systems particularly adept at sequestering carbon and keeping it out of our atmosphere. Eighty-three percent of the world's carbon is circulated through the ocean, and half of it is sequestered by these important coastal habitats, even though they make up only 2 percent of the world's total ocean area. When healthy, coastal systems [store](#) carbon at a faster rate than terrestrial forests, and continue to do so for a longer periods of time. And yet, our coastal systems are under significant threat. It is projected that anywhere from [20 to 90 percent](#) of coastal wetlands will be lost by 2100 due to sea level rise and habitat degradation, with an average of [78 percent](#) expected under high sea level rise projections.

As the U.S. Senate embarks on the scientific and technical knowledge necessary to address a changing climate and building the frameworks required for market-based systems based on potential future carbon markets, our nation's ability to harness land- and water-based resources to adapt to climate change, build climate resilience, and sequester carbon is essential. The Blue Carbon for Our Planet legislation is a positive step toward ensuring these opportunities exist for our marine systems. Specifically, S. 3939 would establish an Interagency Working Group on Blue Carbon, led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), to map and identify blue carbon ecosystems in the United States, assess degraded resources, and highlight opportunities to restore these important natural systems. Further, the legislation would require NOAA to identify national restoration priorities that would produce the highest rate of carbon sequestration and greatest ecosystem benefits, and then integrate pilot programs across geographically and ecologically diverse locations to restore degraded coastal blue carbon ecosystems, among other objectives.

As you work to move S. 3939 forward in the Senate, our community is requesting a clarifying amendment in order to fully support this legislation. Specifically, the legislation includes an assessment of the feasibility and potential of establishing a national goal of conserving at least 30 percent of the ocean and coastal blue carbon ecosystems within the territory of the United States by 2030, including the effects of climate change and sea level rise on such a goal. We are requesting additional clarifying language be added to this section in order to ensure the full suite of currently established marine and estuarine conservation areas is included within this national goal. Further, a

national conservation goal for these systems must also ensure these areas remain open for the public's enjoyment and benefit and recreational boating and fishing are deemed as appropriate uses of marine and freshwater systems included within a national 30x30 goal. Our full recommended language to S. 3939 in Section 5(a)(3)(A) is as follows (in blue):

“(3) assess the feasibility and potential of—

(A) establishing a national goal of conserving at least 30 percent of the ocean and coastal blue carbon ecosystems within the territory of the United States by 2030, including the effects of climate change and sea level rise on such goal; provided

(i) currently established Marine Sanctuaries, Marine Protected Areas, National Wildlife Refuges, and other federal, state, and local designations are inventoried and included in the 30 percent conservation goal;

(ii) recreational fishing and boating are deemed appropriate uses of areas included in the conservation goal, and will be allowed subject to existing management authorities; and

(iii) the feasibility study shall identify methods for improving recreational access to areas that are, or will be, included in the conservation goal.”

Our organizations strongly support this important next step for our nation's coastal systems, and we offer our support for the Blue Carbon for Our Planet legislation with this clarifying language.

Sincerely,

American Sportfishing Association
Angler Action Foundation
Bonefish and Tarpon Trust
Izaak Walton League of America
Fly Fishers International
National Deer Alliance
National Marine Manufacturers Association
North American Grouse Partnership
Quality Deer Management Association
Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Wildlife Mississippi