

INTERIM RESOLUTION 2025-009

REQUESTING THAT THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SHOW SUPPORT FOR THE HABITAT IN THE PRAIRIE POTHOLE REGION OF THE WEST-CENTRAL UNITED STATES AND URGE THE UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TO UPHOLD ROBUST SETBACK RULES THAT PROTECT WETLAND AND WATERFOWL POPULATIONS.

WHEREAS, the Prairie Pothole Region is the "Duck Factory" of North America that produces more than half of the continent's migratory waterfowl and supports critical breeding and feeding habitats for ducks and other wildlife; and

WHEREAS, the United States continues to lose wetlands at an accelerated pace across the Prairie Pothole Region, and any United States Fish and Wildlife Service action should seek to minimize this rate of loss; and

WHEREAS, hunters, anglers, and conservationists have invested billions of dollars in wildlife habitats through duck stamp purchases, hunting licenses, and Pittman-Robertson Act funding, which has created one of America's greatest conservation success stories; and

WHEREAS, the conservation value of these habitats cannot be overstated; and

WHEREAS, since 1934, Federal Duck Stamp revenues, funding provided primarily by generations of sportsmen and women, have conserved more than six million (6,000,000) acres of habitat nationwide, including over one million seven hundred thousand (1,700,000) acres protected by voluntary National Wildlife Refuge System easements in the Prairie Pothole Region; and

WHEREAS, these lands form the core habitat base necessary for waterfowl population resilience and recovery, and any action that facilitates wetland drainage would disregard those investments and the promise that those duck stamp funds be used to conserve critical waterfowl habitat in National Wildlife Refuge System units and in easements that conserve wetlands and

1 grasslands in the Prairie Pothole Region; and

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3 WHEREAS, with recent waterfowl populations on the brink of potential
4 restrictive seasons for more than one million (1,000,000) American duck
5 hunters, now is the time to be expanding and protecting conservation
6 investments, not weakening them; and

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8 WHEREAS, the United States is facing a critical time for waterfowl
9 populations; and

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11 WHEREAS, without the habitats conserved through these voluntary
12 easements, recent drought conditions could have caused greater impacts to
13 waterfowl populations and harvest opportunities by potentially requiring more
14 restrictive hunting regulations; and

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16 WHEREAS, according to the 2025 Waterfowl Population Status Report, pond
17 counts in the Prairie Pothole Region dropped to four million two hundred
18 thousand (4,200,000), which is a nineteen percent (19%) reduction from 2024
19 and twenty percent (20%) below the long-term average; and

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21 WHEREAS, because fifty percent (50%) to seventy-five percent (75%) of
22 North American Waterfowl are produced within the Prairie Pothole Region,
23 relying on these highly productive shallow wetlands for settling patterns,
24 breeding, brood rearing, and staging during migration, any degradation to
25 habitats reverberates nationwide; and

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27 WHEREAS, notably, mallard populations sit at under six million six
28 hundred thousand (6,600,000), which is seventeen percent (17%) below the
29 long-term average and forty-four percent (44%) lower than just a decade ago;
30 and

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32 WHEREAS, blue-winged teal populations have fallen to their lowest
33 levels since the early 2000s, necessitating reduced season lengths during the
34 September early teal season; and

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36 WHEREAS, as a leading state in duck harvest, Arkansas recognizes the

1 link between the quality of breeding habitat in the Prairie Pothole Region
2 for continental duck populations and hunting seasons for Arkansas waterfowl
3 hunters; and
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5 WHEREAS, conserving these essential habitats is imperative not only for
6 sustaining the population but also for safeguarding this heritage for future
7 generations; and
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9 WHEREAS, compromising the hydrologic integrity of wetland easements
10 will further suppress annual fall flights, directly impacting the future of
11 waterfowl hunting and harming rural economies dependent on outdoor
12 recreation; and
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14 WHEREAS, in Arkansas alone, duck hunters contribute over three hundred
15 million dollars (\$300,000,000) to the state's economy annually; and
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17 WHEREAS, the current United States Fish and Wildlife Service rule
18 regarding drain tile setbacks upholds the integrity of voluntary easement
19 contracts by preventing the drainage of protected wetlands, provides
20 landowners with individualized setback plans, and offers safe harbor to
21 landowners who implement them; and
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23 WHEREAS, if the current rule is not kept in place, the door is open for
24 potential drainage of National Wildlife Refuge System easements that protect
25 our hunting heritage; and
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27 WHEREAS, once these wetlands are lost, our waterfowl and our hunting
28 heritage are lost as well; and
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30 WHEREAS, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service should maintain
31 the sixty (60) years of precedent and uphold its commitment to protecting
32 publicly funded, voluntary conservation easements, critical wildlife habitat,
33 and America's outdoor traditions by keeping this rule in place; and
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35 WHEREAS, for generations, hunters and conservationists have invested
36 heavily in the National Wildlife Refuge System to sustain migratory waterfowl

1 populations and preserve America's hunting heritage; and

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3 WHEREAS, given the indispensable relationship between waterfowl
4 conservation efforts and hunting opportunities, we strongly urge the United
5 States Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure any regulatory, management, or
6 administrative action does not cause any degradation, fragmentation, or loss
7 of habitat on these publicly funded, voluntary conservation easements,

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9 NOW THEREFORE,

10 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF THE NINETY-FIFTH GENERAL
11 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

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13 THAT the Legislative Council show support for the habitat in the
14 Prairie Pothole Region of the west-central United States and urge the United
15 States Fish and Wildlife Service to uphold robust, science-based setback
16 rules to steward these investments, protect both wetland hydrology and
17 waterfowl populations, and support rural economies for generations to come.

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19 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT upon adoption of this resolution, a copy of this
20 resolution be provided to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior and
21 the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

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25 Respectfully submitted,

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29 Senator Missy Irvin
30 District 24

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34 Representative Johnny Rye
35 District 36

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3 Senator Justin Boyd
4 District 27
5 Prepared by: CRH/CRH
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