

May 12, 2026

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chair
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman,

On behalf of our 179 organizations and our millions of members and supporters, we strongly oppose H.R. 8509, introduced by Rep. Jared Golden. The bill would extend by seven years the unprecedented extinction rider included in the FY2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act, once again delaying critical protections for North Atlantic Right Whales and allowing continued entanglement in fishing gear to push the species closer to extinction.

The Right Whale extinction rider prevented the National Marine Fisheries Service from issuing a more protective rule to further reduce the risk of entanglement and death in the U.S. lobster fishery until December 31, 2028 — despite multiple court decisions holding that, based on scientific evidence, the agency failed to provide the whale with sufficient protections from entanglement-related mortality. During this legislative rider-moratorium period, [55 whales have been documented dead or injured](#) or in poor health. Of these, 31 were confirmed as entanglements in fishing gear.

H.R. 8509 would push management off another seven years, further driving the Right Whale towards extinction. Based on [NOAA's most recent population estimate](#), fewer than 400 Right Whales remain, with a critically low number of 70 breeding females. Entanglement in vertical fishing lines remains one of the two primary causes of serious injury and death, and unfortunately the evidence is now clear that [fishing gear from Maine does in fact entangle whales](#). Every year that passes without removing those lines from the water brings the Right Whale closer to extinction.

Instead of risking the extinction of this critically endangered species, Congress should focus its efforts on achieving win-win conservation solutions. On-demand (“pop-up”) fishing gear works. In Massachusetts, a fisherman tested the same gear in early 2025 and [reported a 100% success rate](#) using this gear. Since 2020, [more than 1,000,000 lbs of seafood have been safely harvested in the U.S. and Canada using on-demand gear](#). The gear has been successfully hauled more than [13,000 times in the Northeast US alone, including Maine waters, with a 90% success rate](#).

Fishermen using on-demand gear as part of an Exempted Fishing Permit greatly improved gear performance through modifications based on areas fished. In addition, fishermen reported on-demand gear moved less in harsh oceanographic conditions as compared to traditional gear and was more likely to be retrieved if gear was displaced, reducing potential gear loss. Improved safety measures include app upgrades for a Man-Over-Board (MOB) emergency release and an alarm system to alert mobile gear of areas where on-demand sets are located. A cloud-based system of digital gear marking provides both fixed and mobile gear users of location data without disclosing propriety information, reducing gear conflict risks.

Congress should provide lobster fishermen in Federal waters the necessary support to fully incentivize adoption of on-demand fishing gear over the next 5-7 years with input and collaboration from the fishing community and states. Federal and state agencies have the resources to fully fund the adoption of these innovative and effective technologies that protect Right Whales, and indeed all of the large baleen whales on both coasts from entanglements. [NOAA is currently authorized](#) to disburse \$400 million annually to fishermen for fisheries disasters and investing a fraction of this funding could dramatically reduce entanglements of whales in the future. Through this funding and additional engagement, lawmakers can support fishing communities instead of prolonging the status quo.

We urge you to oppose H.R. 8509 and any other effort to extend the existing rider, while providing funding that benefits both Right Whale recovery and fishing communities.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
1000 Grandmothers for Future Generations
350 Colorado
350 Mass Metro North Node
7th Generation Advisors
Advocates for Snake Preservation
American Indian Mothers Inc.
Animal Defenders International
Animal Welfare Institute (AWI)
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc
Antelope Valley Conservancy
Aqua Terra Aeris Law Group
Backbone Campaign
Battle Creek Alliance & Defiance Canyon Raptor Rescue
Becoming a Good Relative
Bold Visions Conservation
Bucks Environmental Action
Buddhist Global Relief
California Communities Against Toxics
Californians for Western Wilderness
CERBAT
Change Begins With ME

Cherokee Concerned Citizens
Christians Caring for Creation
Christians For The Mountains
Church Women United in New York State
City of Birmingham
Ciudadanos Del Karso
Clean Ocean Action
Conservation Alabama
Conservation Congress
Conservation Council for Hawai'i
CORALations, Inc.
DivestNJ
Dolphin Connection
Don't Gas the Meadowlands Coalition
Earth Ethics, Inc.
Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)
Fal Energy Partnership
FMG/women of the Americas
Forest Keeper
Foundation Earth
FreshWater Accountability Project
Friends of Bell Smith Springs
Friends of Big Ivy
Friends of Hurricane Creek
Friends of Merrymeeting Bay
Friends of the Earth US
Fuerza Mundial
Glen Canyon Institute
Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association
Great Lakes Wildlife Alliance
Green State Solutions
Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice
GreenFaith
Greenpeace USA
Hands Across the Sand
HealthyPlanet
Heirs To Our Ocean
Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History
Humane Action Pennsylvania
I Heart Pisgah Coalition
In Defense of Animals
Indiana Forest Alliance
Indivisible Cranbury

inland Empire Task Force
Institute for a Democratic Psychoanalysis
Interfaith oceans
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Izaak Walton League Rapid City SD Chapter
Kentucky Environmental Foundation
Kettle Range Conservation Group
Kickapoo Peace Circle
Kids for Saving Earth
Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Kodiak Audubon
La Purisima Audubon Society
Levanah Farm
Los Angeles Waterkeeper
Maine Audubon
ManaSota-88, Inc.
Marine Mammal Alliance Nantucket (MMAN)
Maryland Ornithological Society
Matanzas Riverkeeper
Moloka'i Community Service Council
Nassau Hiking & Outdoor Club
Natural Resources Defense Council
NC WARN
New Hampshire Audubon
New Jersey Forest Watch
Next 100 Coalition
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)
Northwest Environmental Advocates
NYC H2O
NYC Plover Project
Oasis Earth
Occidental Arts and Ecology Center
Ocean Conservation Research
Ocean Defenders Alliance
Ocean Defense Initiative
Oceanic Preservation Society
Operation HomeCare, Inc.
Orange County Coastkeeper
ORLEANS AUDUBON SOCIETY
Peace Boat US
Peak Plastic Foundation
Pelican Media
Predator Defense
Protect PT
Public Lands Project
Rachel Carson Council

Raptors Are The Solution
Recycle Hawaii
Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation
Resource Renewal Institute
RESTORE: The North Woods
Rewilding Institute
Russian Riverkeeper
Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples
San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society
Sane Energy Project
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Save The Albatross Coalition (STAC)
SAVE THE FROGS!
Save The World's Rivers
Sciencecorps
Sea Turtle Conservancy
Seaside Sustainability
Shawnee Natural Area Guardians
Sierra Club
Sisters of Charity of New York PJIC Office
Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York
Social Compassion in Legislation
SocioEnergetics
South Asian Fund For Education Scholarship and Training Inc
South Florida Wildlands Association
South Shore Audubon Society
Species Unite
Spokane Ecosocialist
Spottswode Estate Vineyard & Winery
St. Johns Riverkeeper
Surfrider Foundation
Sustainable Bainbridge
Sustainable Finger Lakes
Syracuse Cultural Workers
Taxpayer
The Cloud Foundation
The Cougar Fund
The Enviro Show
The Forest Foundation, Inc.
The Interfaith Council for the Protection of Animals & Nature
The Last Plastic Straw
The Marine Mammal Center
The Shame Free Zone
The Wei LLC
The Whaleman Foundation
Tompkins Conservation

Topanga Peace Alliance; MLK Coalition of Greater Los Angeles
Turtle Island Restoration Network
United We Eat
Upper West Side Recycling
UUCM Green Team
Valley Women's Club Environmental Committee
Watershed Alliance of Marin
WESPAC Foundation, Inc.
Western Nebraska Resources Council
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wild Cumberland
WildEarth Guardians
Wilderness Southeast
Wildlife for All
Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation
Wishtoyo Foundation
Wolf Hollow
Wyoming Untrapped
Yaak Valley Forest Council