

Opening Statement
The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
Tuesday, June 16, 2009
H.R. 2055, *the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act of 2009*, and
H.R. 2565, *the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act*

Healthy aquatic fish habitats are vital to America's environment, economy, and culture. Healthy aquatic habitats promote self-sustaining populations of fish and biological diversity, and provide important environmental functions that benefit society, such as flood control and groundwater recharge. These habitats are also a major economic driver, supporting recreation for more than 44 million anglers, millions of jobs, and \$160 billion per year in economic activity related to commercial and recreational fishing.

Unfortunately, high quality fish habitat is in decline across much of the United States. Reductions in the quality and quantity of fish habitat stress all fish populations, even the most iconic American species such as Eastern Brook Trout and Pacific Salmon. A recent report by the American Fisheries Society found that 40% of North American fishes, including 700 species, are imperiled. Of those species that were imperiled in 1989, 89% of those populations were the same or worse in 2008.

The general consensus among fisheries scientists, economists, and natural resource managers is that strategic conservation of the healthiest aquatic fish habitats will efficiently and cost-effectively conserve fish populations, support the economy, and preserve important environmental functions. The bills before us today apply this strategic conservation approach.

It is estimated that strategic conservation of only 20% of the existing Pacific salmon range in the lower 48 States may conserve 46% of the total abundance of salmon in the continental U.S. H.R. 2055 implements this strategy by identifying and supporting regional efforts to conserve the best available Pacific salmon habitat—known as salmon strongholds.

Salmon strongholds are identified using science-based criteria and conserved through locally-supported projects with leveraged funds. This bill also authorizes a Pacific Salmon Stronghold Partnership to enhance coordination between local, non-governmental, and governmental stakeholders to implement these projects.

I commend my colleague, Congressman Mike Thompson, for introducing his bill and for garnering regional, bi-partisan support for his legislation.

We will also hear testimony on H.R. 2565, which authorizes the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, a national investment strategy that strategically evaluates and allocates funding to priority projects that protect, restore, and enhance healthy fish habitat. Similar to H.R. 2055, this legislation authorizes Fish Habitat Conservation Partnerships to identify regional priorities,

implement stakeholder-driven conservation projects, and coordinate public and private conservation efforts.

I congratulate my Subcommittee colleague, Congressman Ron Kind, for introducing his bill.

We find ourselves in a dynamic era, where threats to fish and their habitats are numerous. Strategic conservation of healthy fish habitats help to combat these threats and protect an environmentally, economically, and culturally important resource. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today regarding these important pieces of legislation.