

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 6, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Aurelia Skipwith
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt and Director Skipwith:

We write to express our strong support for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's (USFWS) consideration of management options for the double-crested cormorant. We urge the Service to move forward in the rulemaking process to provide depredation measures in free swimming, wild fish areas and aquaculture facilities.

Double-crested cormorants are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. However, in May 2016, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia vacated the longstanding cormorant depredation orders, noting the USFWS had not done its due diligence to analyze these orders' impacts on other resources or on the overall cormorant population. We support the basic tenets of the MBTA and recognize the need to protect species across the country, including the cormorant; however, the current lack of effective management is unacceptable. Each day without established management options threatens the livelihood of recreational and commercial fishing industries, which are critical to our local economies.

We urge the USFWS to collaborate with state fish and wildlife agencies, tribes, and Federal partners to create a long-term solution for both aquaculture and free-swimming fisheries. We acknowledge the relief provided in the November 2018 Environmental Assessment (EA) allowing for the lethal take of cormorants in aquaculture facilities, but failure to address free swimming and recreational fisheries is detrimental to that recent success. Even with the EA, we have seen our communities continue to struggle with the current damage to natural resources and loss of fish populations. The USFWS must maintain accurate data and establish management and control options for both wild fisheries and aquaculture facilities. This will help our state fish and wildlife agencies, tribes, and Federal partner prevent the negative impact of over population of the double-crested cormorant on fish populations, human health and safety, and on other species.

We thank the USFWS for its work to address cormorant management and urge its continued use of the best science and data available to bring relief to our communities in a transparent and open process. Representing areas impacted by this critical issue, we stand ready to work with the USFWS to reinstate cormorant control measures across the United States.

Sincerely,



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress



Rick Crawford
Member of Congress



Michael Guest
Member of Congress