

September 22, 2022

The Honorable Roger Wicker
U.S. Senate
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Elvira Salazar
U.S. House of Representatives
1616 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Don McEachin
U.S. House of Representatives
314 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Wicker and Cantwell, and Representatives Salazar and McEachin,

Thank you for your leadership in introducing the Youth Coastal Fishing Program Act of 2022. This bill will provide opportunities for youth to experience their local marine or Great Lakes environment, promoting natural resource stewardship and participation in outdoor recreation.

88% of current fishing participants fished before the age of 12, highlighting the importance of being exposed to fishing at a young age. Not only does spending time outdoors fishing provide health benefits, but research has shown that participants in outdoor recreation place higher importance on environmental values and stand as stronger conservation stewards. This is clearly the case with recreational anglers, who collectively contribute \$1.7 billion annually to conservation through license fees, excise taxes and direct donations.

Access to nature can be a challenge, particularly for Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities; individuals with access and functional needs; and those adversely affected by poverty. Some of these barriers include a lack of connection to nature and feelings of “otherness” in the outdoors. Early introduction to outdoor recreation in a safe, accessible and inclusive space is needed to grow participation and environmental stewardship.

While other federal land management agencies have dedicated programs to connect the public to nature, there is no such recreation program within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which manages federal marine fisheries. The Youth Coastal Fishing Program Act fills this gap in NOAA programming, ensuring that youth get the opportunity to connect with their local marine or Great Lakes environment.

We are grateful for your commitment to improving the lives of America’s youth by increasing recreational fishing opportunities through the Youth Coastal Fishing Program

Act. We are ready to assist you as you work toward the passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

American Sportfishing Association
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
BoatU.S.
Bonfish & Tarpon Trust
Center for Sportfishing Policy
Chesapeake Conservancy
Coastal Conservation Association
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Ebony Anglers
Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation
Hunters of Color
International Game Fish Association
Izaak Walton League of America
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas
National Fishing in Schools Program
National Marine Manufacturers Association
Outdoor Afro
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Wild Oceans
Youth Environmental Alliance