State of Arkansas
93rd General Assembly
Regular Session, 2021 HCR 1014

By: Representatives Wardlaw, Perry
By: Senator M. Pitsch

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

TO EMPHASIZE THE VALUE OF WATERFOWL AND WATERFOWL HABITAT IN ARKANSAS TO THE ECONOMY, RECREATION, HERITAGE, AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE STATE; AND TO SUPPORT EFFORTS THAT BOOST THIS CRITICAL PART OF THE STATE'S ECONOMY.

Subtitle

TO EMPHASIZE THE VALUE OF WATERFOWL AND WATERFOWL HABITAT IN ARKANSAS TO THE ECONOMY, RECREATION, HERITAGE, AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE STATE; AND TO SUPPORT EFFORTS THAT BOOST THIS CRITICAL PART OF THE STATE'S ECONOMY.

WHEREAS, Arkansas has some of the most important landscapes in North America for waterfowl and habitat resources, including the Grand Prairie of Arkansas and alluvial floodplains of the Arkansas River and the Mississippi River and their tributaries, the Ouachita River, Red River, White River, Cache River, Black River, L'Anguille River, St. Francis River, Little Red River, Bayou DeView, and Bayou Meto, which harbor some of the most important bottomland hardwood forests in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Arkansas leads the country in rice production and produces approximately fifty percent (50%) of the rice grown in the United States, which contributes over six billion dollars ($6,000,000,000) annually to the state's economy and employs more than twenty-five thousand (25,000)

Arkansans. These flooded rice fields provide more than one-third (1/3) of the calories available to wintering waterfowl and thereby support our reputation as the Duck Capital of the World; and

WHEREAS, there are more than fifty thousand (50,000) acres of greentree reservoirs in wildlife management areas across the state. The levees, water control structures, and other infrastructure used to manage these greentree reservoirs are critical for providing habitat and waterfowl hunting opportunities; however, after many decades of use, water management capability has become outdated and is in need of renovation and upgrades; and

WHEREAS, the consequences of this situation are dire for waterfowl and hunters, as desirable trees are being lost or damaged. According to forest health data collected by the Arkansas State Game and Fish Commission, a significant proportion of oaks in these greentree reservoirs are undergoing severe water stress and damage; and

WHEREAS, outdoor recreation is a major economic driver in Arkansas, generating an estimated nine billion seven hundred million dollars ($9,700,000,000) in consumer spending and supporting more than ninety-six thousand (96,000) jobs in this state, according to a study conducted by the Outdoor Industry Association; and

WHEREAS, according to the Arkansas State Game and Fish Commission, Arkansas hosts more than one hundred thousand (100,000) waterfowl hunters each year, many of whom hunt our iconic flooded timber and rice fields; and

WHEREAS, these hunters support Arkansas's economy by contributing an estimated economic impact of over seventy million dollars ($70,000,000) annually or about one million dollars ($1,000,000) each day duck season is open; and

WHEREAS, in 2013, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and USA Rice Federation formed a private-public partnership, known as the "Rice Stewardship Partnership", which has achieved great success in helping farmers implement sustainable practices on their lands. Through these and other practices, Arkansas rice

farmers have worked hard to decrease land use by thirty-five percent (35%), energy use by thirty-eight percent (38%), and water use by fifty-three percent (53%). These practices have been vital for protecting farmlands and sustaining rice production in Arkansas while also benefiting waterfowl and waterfowl hunters; and

WHEREAS, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., and the Arkansas State Game and Fish Commission have embarked on a similar private-public partnership to conserve Arkansas's flooded timber legacy. In 2020, they, along with other private and corporate partners, invested significant resources to begin repairing and replacing outdated infrastructure at Earl Buss Bayou DeView, Dave Donaldson Black River, and Henry Gray Hurricane Lake wildlife management areas to ensure water can be moved more efficiently to encourage growth and regeneration of desirable oaks, with similar projects planned at other wildlife management areas across the state; and

WHEREAS, it is not just duck hunters who stand to benefit. These forests, many of which occur in our wildlife management areas and national wildlife refuges, should be viewed as a form of natural infrastructure that protects our communities from the harmful effects of flooding and also stores and sequesters carbon. For reference, the one hundred seventy-five thousand (175,000) acres of bottomland hardwood forests in wildlife management areas store approximately one hundred twenty-three thousand (123,000) acres of carbon or the equivalent of one million (1,000,000) barrels of oil, ninety-seven thousand (97,000) passenger cars driven for a year, or fifty-seven billion five hundred million (57,500,000,000) smartphones charged; and

WHEREAS, the One-Hundred-Sixteenth United States Congress enacted the Great American Outdoors Act, which prioritizes maintaining and improving our existing public lands through permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund at nine hundred million dollars ($900,000,000) annually, and also enacted America's Conservation Enhancement Act, reauthorizing the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, which supports voluntary habitat conservation projects that benefit migratory birds and waterfowl and supports hunting opportunities on Arkansas's public lands like Earl Buss Bayou Deview and Henry Gray Hurricane Lake wildlife management areas. In Arkansas alone,

the North American Wetlands Conservation Act has conserved more than seventy-seven thousand (77,000) acres of wildlife habitat, in addition to conserving critical breeding grounds in the Prairie Pothole Region, the area in which most of Arkansas's ducks are hatched; and

WHEREAS, additional private, state, and federal investment is needed to fund essential infrastructure improvements, and private-public partnerships are the most successful method for delivering these resources to conserve waterfowl habitat on public and private lands,

NOW THEREFORE,
BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NINETY-THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS, THE SENATE CONCURRING THEREIN:

THAT the General Assembly support collaborative efforts that conserve waterfowl and waterfowl habitat on public and private lands and that promote hunting opportunities as well as recognize the benefits these resources provide for the state's economy.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the General Assembly encourage the Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism to work with the Arkansas State Game and Fish Commission to ensure that the priorities of the Arkansas Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan include bottomland hardwood restoration projects that support waterfowl hunting opportunities.