

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 24, 2023

Honorable Mike Simpson  
Chair  
Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Chellie Pingree  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree:

As you construct the FY 2024 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill, I write to express strong concerns about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service management of double-crested cormorants and pelicans within the Green Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and specifically on Pilot Island.

The Service acquired Plum and Pilot Islands by Public Land Order 7681 and established the islands to protect the habitat of native and migratory birds and endangered species within the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem. Pilot Island provides a nesting habitat for a large colony of double-crested cormorants and is one of very few islands in the Great Lakes Region that do not experience any form of cormorant management. Cormorant management is intentionally not used by FWS on Pilot Island due to its lack of vegetation. However, this is most likely due to cormorant colonization.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1970s, Pilot Island was covered by native shrub and a canopy of white cedar, paper birch and Canada yew. Dense colonies of cormorants have stripped leaves from trees for their nests, and their highly acidic guano has rendered soil inhospitable for native plants. All that remains are a few shrubs, and weedy invasive plants.<sup>2</sup> These habitat changes have opened the door to other ground nesting species, such as white pelicans, which can perpetuate damage.<sup>3</sup>

I have heard from numerous constituents who are disappointed with the Service's decisions to allow cormorants to proliferate in Door County and nest unrestricted on Pilot Island. Home to a structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places (83004279), Pilot Island is closed to the public to further protect nesting areas.<sup>4</sup> Human health concerns compound the difficulty for contractors to make repairs to the historic structures. The Newcastle Disease, which is a

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Habitat Management Plan: Green Bay and Gravel Island National Wildlife Refuges*, October 2017. <https://ecos.fws.gov/ServCat/DownloadFile/146318>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Dorr, B.S., Sullivan, K.L., Curtis, P.D., Chipman, R.B., McCullough, R.D. "Double-crested Cormorants". *U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services*. August 2016. [https://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife\\_damage/reports/Wildlife%20Damage%20Management%20Technical%20Series/Cormorants-WDM-Technical-Series.pdf](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/reports/Wildlife%20Damage%20Management%20Technical%20Series/Cormorants-WDM-Technical-Series.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Habitat Management Plan*.

persistent threat to cormorants on refuge islands, can also be contracted by humans through contact with guano.<sup>5</sup>

Nearby Washington Island constituents and those who travel the ferry during peak tourism months have remarked on the offensive and pervasive odor from droppings near nesting areas. The guano's stench impacts not only property values but tourism and recreation, potentially causing economic losses for residents and businesses that rely on income from tourism.<sup>6</sup>

Constituents are further frustrated with the Service's lack of concern to the impact of Lake Michigan fisheries, specifically yellow perch, caused by predation of cormorants and pelicans. FWS recognize that cormorants can take quantities of fish significant enough to negatively impact catch rates, and that management can perhaps benefit fish populations. They note, however, that more research is needed.<sup>7</sup> In areas where some form of cormorant management is implemented, monitoring indicated that yellow perch populations improved and have been sustained at historical levels.<sup>8</sup>

To better understand the impact of these birds on fisheries in the northwest region of Lake Michigan, I request the committee include the following report language:

*The committee directs U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to collaborate with other state and federal agencies on a study of the impact of double-crested cormorants and white pelicans on yellow perch and sports fish populations in federal waters adjacent to Washington Island, Pilot Island and northern Door County. The committee further encourages U.S. Fish and Wildlife to review the compatibility determination on the Green Bay National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan for double-crested cormorant management and fish rehabilitation with consideration given to area residents' concerns relating to the cumulative impact of high-density colonies of cormorants on local economies and the historic structures on Pilot Island.*

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. I very much appreciate your time to consider this request and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Mike Gallagher  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup> Dorr, B.S. et al. "Double Crested Cormorants".

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "Expanding Management of Conflicts Associated with Double-crested Cormorants, Frequently Asked Questions". <https://www.fws.gov/node/417891>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.