2021 Regular Session

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 55

BY REPRESENTATIVE ZERINGUE

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To create the Outdoor Conservation Study Group, to study and make recommendations regarding conservation funding mechanisms as well as conservation programs that could be generated from such funding.

WHEREAS, Louisiana is blessed with abundant fish and wildlife species and globally important lands and waters which provide important habitats, improve the quality of drinking water, and support commercial and recreational activities; and

WHEREAS, Louisiana's agricultural industry includes working lands and forests that are essential to sustainable habitats and economic productivity; and

WHEREAS, Louisiana is known as "Sportsman's Paradise" because its lands and waters offer exceptional opportunities for both commercial and recreational activities that inject billions of dollars into our economy annually; and

WHEREAS, during the COVID-19 pandemic, visitation to outdoor areas increased dramatically and the mental and physical health benefits of access to such areas have been documented; and

WHEREAS, conservation and preservation of these important lands and waters will ensure that the value they provide is available to future generations; and

WHEREAS, many of Louisiana's important habitats are diminishing with inadequate funding and resources to conserve them; and

WHEREAS, many of our neighboring states have increased investments in conservation funding in order to leverage other funding opportunities for important habitats in their state; and

WHEREAS, Louisiana is missing opportunities for matching funds available through public and private sources that could be used to conserve important lands and waters in urban and rural areas throughout our state; and

WHEREAS, many states in the Southeast region have determined that establishing a dedicated source of conservation funding has allowed them to greatly leverage their investment in conserving important habitats and thirty-eight states have similarly dedicated funding; and

WHEREAS, states have utilized different mechanisms to increase investments in conservation funding, resulting in both conservation of important habitats as well as increasing revenues to the state's economy; and

WHEREAS, the identification of financial opportunities and structures that would provide sustained funding for enhanced conservation efforts is critical to the preservation of fish and wildlife species and habitats, the improvement of drinking water, and the continued support of commercial and recreational outdoor activities; and

WHEREAS, establishing dedicated sources of funding and investment mechanisms based on a comprehensive study of potential solutions could generate tens of millions of dollars for conservation in Louisiana.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby create the Outdoor Conservation Study Group, whose duties shall be to study and make recommendations regarding conservation funding and provides that, at a minimum, the study shall include the following:

(1)   Potential mechanisms to increase conservation funding for the state of Louisiana.

(2)   Potential programs for which such funds could serve as match.

(3)   The purpose for which the conservation funds may be used.

(4)   An administrative structure for the funds, including criteria for project selection and method of disbursement.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the study group shall be composed of the following members:

(1)   The governor or his designee.

(2)   The executive assistant for the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities or his designee.

(3)   The commissioner of administration or his designee.

(4)   The secretary of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries or his designee.

(5)   The secretary of the Department of Natural Resources or his designee.

(6)   The commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Forestry or his designee.

(7)   The lieutenant governor or his designee.

(8)   One member appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives.

(9)   One member appointed by the president of the Senate.

(10)   The chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment or his designee.

(11)   The chairman of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources or his designee.

(12)   Three members selected by the governor from nonprofit conservation organizations having offices in Louisiana and engaged in conservation efforts in the state.

(13)   One member from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

(14)   One member from the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the United States Department of Agriculture shall be nonvoting members.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the member appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives shall call the first meeting of the study group at which meeting the study group shall select a chair and other officers it deems necessary.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana office of The Nature Conservancy is hereby requested to provide any necessary staff support to the study group.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the study group shall submit a report with its recommendations to the House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources by February 1, 2022.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the governor of the state of Louisiana, the executive assistant for the Governor's Office of Coastal Activities, the commissioner of administration, the secretary of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the secretary of the Department of Natural Resources, the Louisiana office of The Nature Conservancy, the commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and

Forestry, the lieutenant governor, the principal deputy director of the United States Fish and

Wildlife Service, and the acting chief of the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE