



National Wildlife Federation

Great Lakes Regional Center

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TESTIMONY OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

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FOR THE

United States Senate Federal Spending Oversight &
Emergency Management Subcommittee

FIELD SUMMIT ON

Local, State and Federal Response to PFAS Contamination in
Michigan

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Thank you, Senator Peters and Chairman Paul, for the opportunity to discuss the critically important issue of PFAS today and its effect on fish, wildlife, and the hunting and angling community. My name is Drew YoungeDyke, and I'm the senior communications coordinator for the National Wildlife Federation Great Lakes Regional Center, as well as a lifelong hunter and angler. Established in 1936, the National Wildlife Federation is America's largest conservation organization, representing more than 6 million members and supporters. Our mission is to unite all Americans to ensure wildlife thrive in a rapidly changing world.

There is no more important concern about the effects of PFAS than the drinking water that sustains every person, and this is a top concern of the National Wildlife Federation. PFAS is yet another reminder of the serious threats to our nation's drinking water. With so many of our communities living with unsafe drinking water – even in a region boasting 20% of the earth's surface freshwater - now is the time to be doing all we can to protect our drinking water, public health, and way of life. In this testimony, however, I hope to provide some context on an additional exposure pathway - our fish and wildlife - a key concern that has not received as much attention to date.

This summer, for example, my wife and I kayaked down the Huron River to celebrate our tenth anniversary. As I often do, I brought along my fly rod, and as I don't often do, I actually caught fish, including a few bluegills. I considered keeping them to grill for dinner – bluegills are delicious – but I decided to release them. Exactly one week later, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services issued a “Do Not Eat” advisory for all fish in the Huron River due to PFAS contamination. Not only was that a close call for us, but my wife and I are expecting our first child. Thousands of families across Michigan are facing the same threat from PFAS.

The extent of PFAS contamination throughout Michigan communities has citizens rightfully worried about the potential impacts it may be having on their health and the health of their families—both where it has already been discovered and where it may yet be. Water is a basic need, and every Michigander is affected when our drinking water is at risk. The accumulation of PFAS chemicals in fish and wildlife doubly affects hunting and angling families where it is found, threatening a source of their food supply as well as their drinking water. Should this cause additional losses in hunting and fishing participation, it will further erode the vital conservation funding and economic activity provided by hunting and fishing in Michigan.

According to Michigan Department of Natural Resources license sales, there are approximately 1.1 million anglers and 700,000 hunters each year in Michigan. They generated a combined \$62.1 million in license sales in 2017, which goes to Michigan's Game and Fish Protection Fund. Federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment sales also generated \$24.3 million in federal grants to Michigan through the Wildlife Restoration Fund (Pittman-Robertson Act) and \$10.7 million through the Sport Fish Restoration Program Fund (Dingell-Johnson Act), according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Hunting and fishing in Michigan support more than 70,000 jobs and generate about \$5 billion in Michigan, according to the Michigan Wildlife Council.

Much fishing can be enjoyed through catch-and-release, but much is done for table fare as well. Anecdotally, a walleye fishing guide serving the Detroit River and Lake Erie told me that he would be out of business if the Huron River's “Do Not Eat” advisory

extended to those waters. However, almost all hunting in Michigan results in table fare.

Out of 700,000 hunters in Michigan, 574,000 are deer hunters who took a combined 376,000 deer in 2017. Each deer can yield 30 to 70 pounds of venison, which equates to 18.8 million pounds of venison harvested in Michigan last year, or 75 million 4-ounce servings. This is significant in terms of food security for many Michigan families. And it's one that few would have considered at risk from PFAS just a few months ago.

On October 19 – in the heart of Michigan's archery deer season – the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources issued a joint "Do Not Eat" advisory for a 5-mile radius around Clark's Marsh in Oscoda Township, which borders the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base, after a single deer was found with elevated levels of PFOS in its muscle tissue. PFOS is a type of PFAS linked to cancer, thyroid, hormone and developmental problems.

While this is one deer in one area of Michigan, this already affects families who rely on venison in that area and could be a canary in the coal mine for other Michigan communities with PFAS water contamination. The thing that seems to be most known about PFAS is that there is so much that we don't know. One of the most urgent priorities for state and federal public officials in addressing growing PFAS contamination in Michigan and across the country is to fully understand the extent of the problem and how to solve it. Scientists at the National Wildlife Federation are currently studying PFAS and our Michigan affiliate – Michigan United Conservation Clubs – is hosting a discussion on PFAS at its next policy meeting in December.

We appreciate your leadership, Sen. Peters, in introducing the PFAS Detection Act (S.3382) with Sen. Stabenow and Sen. Rounds. A better understanding of where PFAS contaminates our water and the resources to clean it up are critically important for every Michigander. A robust investment in research and monitoring will be essential to understand where the problem is, what the impacts are, and how best to protect communities from this toxic contamination, including establishing a drinking water standard for PFAS using a health based standard (maximum contaminant level) with consideration of low-dose toxicity and ensuring adequate protection for populations most vulnerable to PFAS effects

From the water we can't drink to the fish we can't keep and the game we can't eat, PFAS must be addressed thoroughly and quickly for Michigan families. We are committed to working with you to find and advocate for solutions which protect our water, our wildlife, and our way of life.

Sincerely,



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