

[House Natural Resource Committee](#)

Legislative Hearing

July 22, 2026

Highlights:

Members emphasized the importance of science-based wildlife and resource management, interagency coordination, and collaboration with state, tribal, and local partners. The SAFE CATTLE Act received largely bipartisan support, while the Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act generated significant debate over how best to balance marine mammal protections with salmon recovery and Tribal treaty obligations.

Bill Discussions:

[H.R. 7466- SAFE CATTLE Act](#)

- The legislation was discussed as a response to the growing threat posed by the New World screwworm, a parasitic pest whose larvae feed on living tissue and can seriously harm livestock and wildlife. Witnesses emphasized that the issue is an animal-health threat rather than a food-safety threat.
- The bill would require the Departments of Agriculture and Interior to establish a formal memorandum of understanding to coordinate surveillance, monitoring, and eradication efforts, particularly on federal lands and in wildlife populations. Supporters argued that the measure would improve cooperation among federal agencies, state officials, and industry partners.
- Representatives from agricultural states expressed concern about the pest's spread and the potential economic consequences for cattle producers. Witnesses explained that the most effective eradication tool remains the sterile-fly technique, which successfully eliminated the screwworm from the United States decades ago. They stressed that combating the pest requires monitoring both livestock and wildlife populations.
- Support for the bill appeared broad and bipartisan. Members characterized it as a common-sense measure that formalizes coordination rather than creating a new federal program. Agricultural stakeholders testified that the legislation would strengthen ongoing eradication efforts and help prevent future outbreaks.

[H.R. 9621- Northwest Endangered Salmon Predation Prevention Act of 2026](#)

- This bill received the most extensive discussion and generated the greatest debate. The legislation addresses conflicts between the Marine Mammal Protection Act and

salmon recovery efforts in the Pacific Northwest by expanding authorities to manage sea lions and harbor seals that prey on endangered salmon and steelhead.

- Supporters argued that pinniped predation has become a major obstacle to salmon recovery and to the exercise of tribal treaty fishing rights. They cited evidence that sea lions and harbor seals consume significant percentages of salmon and steelhead populations in the Columbia River and Puget Sound. Several witnesses testified that current law is too restrictive because it limits where management can occur and requires burdensome identification of individual animals.
- The bill would expand the geographic areas where state and tribal co-managers can remove problem pinnipeds, allow more flexible management methods, include broader tribal participation, and extend management authority throughout the Columbia River and portions of Western Washington. Supporters maintained that these changes are necessary to protect salmon, support tribal treaty rights, and preserve investments made in salmon recovery programs.
- NOAA acknowledged that pinniped predation is a significant obstacle to salmon recovery and stated that existing authorities have not been effective at the scale needed. NOAA expressed support for additional flexibility that would allow state and tribal managers to address predation hotspots more effectively.
- Opponents and skeptics raised concerns that the bill places too much emphasis on pinniped predation while overlooking other factors affecting salmon populations, including habitat degradation, dams, altered waterways, and ocean conditions. They questioned whether broad lethal-removal authority would produce measurable improvements in salmon recovery and warned of potential unintended ecological consequences.
- A retired NOAA scientist testified that habitat loss remains the primary factor limiting salmon recovery and argued that widespread pinniped removals would likely have limited long-term effects. In contrast, representatives from Washington State and several members of Congress argued that predator management is a necessary component of a broader salmon recovery strategy and that existing targeted removals have already demonstrated measurable benefits in certain locations.