

two or three nesting pairs of eagles that were left in our region of the country. That is now up over 84 nesting pairs of eagles. We expect those numbers to increase in ensuing years as well.

We see the natural wonders of the Lake Erie marshlands as an economic boon to our north coast region through ecotourism, which is expanding. We want families to enjoy the roller coasters at Cedar Point in Sandusky and then drive a few miles west to see the bald eagles at the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. We want tourists to enjoy some of the greatest fishing on Earth. I would like to say that I represent the bathtub of the Great Lakes. We have more fish and more swimmers than any other part of the region, or anyplace in the world, in the central and western basins of Lake Erie and also some of the greatest bird watching in the world as well.

H.R. 289 will help us build on this momentum, not only for Ottawa but also for the Lower Detroit International Wildlife Refuge. I want to personally express my deep gratitude to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL), seniority number one here in the House, for his leadership for our entire region.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the Members to vote "yes" on H.R. 289.

Mr. GILCHREST. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 289.

This proposal has been the subject of two congressional hearings. We have heard from a diverse group of witnesses testifying in strong support of expanding the boundaries of these two existing refuges. One of those witnesses is the director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. In his statement, Mr. Samuel Speck noted that this measure will "ensure an abundance of ecological and conservation improvements that will truly benefit this "Great Lake" and the millions of Americans who benefit from it".

The fundamental goal of H.R. 289 is to conserve the wetland resources of the western basin of Lake Erie. This shallow body of water is, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, the 11th largest fresh water lake in the world and it has the most productive fishing habitat in all of the Great Lakes.

While sadly more than 98 percent of the original wetlands in Northwest Ohio have been lost, the remaining 12,500 acres provide irreplaceable habitat for 325 species of birds, 300 species of plants and 43 fish species. In fact, the western basin is used by 70 percent of the black ducks that migrate in the Mississippi flyway and it provides nesting habit for 79 breeding pairs of bald eagles.

The remaining wetlands should be protected and the most effective way to accomplish that goal is to include available habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Furthermore, it is my hope that by expanding these refuges, all interested parties will work together to devise a comprehensive strategy to protect and restore the physical and biological integrity of the Lake Erie western basin ecosystem.

I urge an "aye" vote and I compliment my colleagues MARCY KAPTUR and JOHN DINGELL for proposing this innovative legislation.

Mr. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 289, legislation that I co-authored with the distinguished gentlewoman from Toledo, Ms. KAPTUR. This important fish and wildlife conservation measure will expand the boundaries of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge to encompass important lands in Southeastern Michigan and Northern Ohio. It is of immense importance to the people of Southeast Michigan and our neighbors to the South in Ohio.

I would like to thank Chairman GILCHREST and Ranking Member PALLONE for their leadership and their assistance. I would also like to thank the Chairman of the full Committee, RICHARD POMBO, and Ranking Member NICK RAHALL, for their assistance is shepherding this bill to the floor. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, in 2001, thanks to the leadership of the Resources Committee and the support from local grassroots organizations, conservation groups, state and local governments, as well as our Canadian neighbors, we were able to create the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Our refuge on the Detroit River is already demonstrating how—working as a team—federal, state, and local officials in the United States and Canada, can work with businesses, conservationists and private citizens to preserve our remaining wildlife habitat along the River and improve the quality of life. H.R. 289 builds on that success, expanding the refuge south into Ohio, to protect the Lake Erie shoreline.

The lands we are talking about encompass an area of tremendous bio-diversity, with unique geological features and a wide variety of plant life that attracts numerous species of fish, birds, and waterfowl.

In the Great Lakes region, there is a tremendous urgency to protect our remaining high-quality habitats before they are lost to further development. We must also do our utmost to rehabilitate and enhance degraded habitat. This is essential to sustain the quality of life enjoyed by the people living along the Detroit River and the Lake Erie corridor.

The Western basin of Lake Erie is vitally important to the economic and environmental future of the United States. In the 1970s and 1980s, the ecological health of Lake Erie was a running joke—fisherman derisively renamed Lake Erie "The Dead Sea." Water quality was poor, and fish and wildlife suffered as a result.

But in the past two decades, the citizens and governmental institutions of both the United States and Canada have devoted increasing attention and resources to the restoration of the water quality and the fisheries of the Great Lakes, including the Western basin. Numerous grassroots environmental and conservation organizations have worked dutifully to address environmental degradation in the region. I am happy to say that these efforts have been successful, though there is still much more that must be done.

The coastal wetlands of Lake Erie support the largest diversity of plant and wildlife species in the Great Lakes. More than 320 species of birds and 43 species of fish have been identified in the aquatic and wetland habitats of the Western basin. The shallow Western basin is home to the largest concentration of marshes in Lake Erie, which makes it a major migratory bird corridor. Seventy percent of the Mississippi Flyway population of black ducks is concentrated in the Lake Erie marshes during fall migration.

The important of Lake Erie is manifested in the United States congressional designation of the Ottawa and Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuges. Lake Erie has an international reputation for walleye, perch, and bass fishing, as well as duck hunting. On an economic basis, Lake Erie tourism accounts for an estimated \$1.5 billion in retail sales and more than 50,000 jobs.

In Michigan, the Refuge will run from the southern boundary of Sterling State Park to the eastern edge of Sandusky Bay, Ohio. The Secretary of Interior is authorized to acquire by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, or grant conservation easements with the boundaries of the Refuge. Any and all acquisitions of lands are voluntary, and federal takings are strictly prohibited. I would note that the Secretary shall administer all federally owned lands, waters, and interests within the Refuge in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act. Thus, the rights of sportsmen and waterfowlers like myself to hunt and fish in accordance with state law will be protected.

Mr. Speaker, I again thank the Resources Committee for their assistance. Ms. KAPTUR's bill is an important piece of legislation which will be great benefit to the people of Michigan, Ohio, and Ontario, and represents a sound approach to protecting, preserving, and restoring the wildlife habitat of the Great Lakes. I urge its adoption.

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. RENZI. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. RENZI) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 289, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. RENZI. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material in the RECORD on H.R. 622, H.R. 762, and H.R. 289, the three bills just considered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arizona?

There was no objection.

EXPRESSING SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING THE BLUE STAR BANNER AND THE GOLD STAR

Mr. GIBBONS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 109) expressing the sense of the Congress regarding the Blue Star Banner and the Gold Star, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 109

Whereas the Blue Star Flag (commonly referred to as the "Blue Star Banner") was