

WILDLIFE

Lawmaker targets feasting birds in bill to protect fish farms

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Rep. Rick Crawford this week introduced legislation that could allow the killing of a migratory bird that feasts at aquaculture farms.

The Arkansas Republican said the double-crested cormorant can "decimate" an aquaculture pond.

"Non-lethal methods alone often aren't enough to prevent the birds from causing serious economic losses for the industry," he said in a statement.

The double-crested cormorant travels through Arkansas and other Southeastern states during its annual migration, making it an enemy of farmers raising catfish fingerlings.

"To get fish farmers the help they need, we've put this on the front burner: It needs to be passed quickly," Crawford said.

H.R. 368, which has been referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, will undoubtedly see pushback from environmental and conservation groups.

Last year, a federal judge ruled that the Fish and Wildlife Service violated the National Environmental Policy Act by authorizing cormorant kills to protect aquaculture, siding with the group **Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility** ([Greenwire](#), May 26, 2016).

The agency was ordered to perform a new environmental analysis on managing the species as a threat to commercially raised fish.

PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch said he isn't sure Crawford's bill would allow for killing the birds.

"It wasn't like our lawsuit invalidated the regulation," Ruch said. "We sued them just because they didn't do it properly." He said he doesn't think FWS is ready to properly authorize the killings.

Ruch also said the migratory season for the double-crested cormorant, which ends in April, could be over by the time the legislation passes if the Senate acts "at its usual speed."

Collette Adkins of the Center for Biological Diversity said there are nonlethal ways of dealing with the bird that don't involve "mass slaughter."

"Thousands of these native birds are killed each year even though numerous nonlethal methods, such as netting and scare devices, have been proven effective in resolving conflicts at aquaculture facilities," said Adkins, the senior attorney for the center.

Crawford introduced a similar measure last year, but that bill didn't see action before the 114th Congress ended.

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