

U.S. Reps. Grothman, Pocan: Introduce SAFE Pathways Act to protect aquatic fisheries and local economies

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(Washington, D.C.) - Today, Congressman Glenn Grothman (R-WI) and Congressman Mark Pocan (D-WI) introduced the *Safeguarding Aquatic Fisheries and Ecosystem (SAFE) Pathways Act*, legislation designed to protect Wisconsin's rivers and lakes from the spread of invasive species, like Asian Carp.

Fishways are a key tool for supporting native fish populations, but when poorly planned, they can inadvertently allow harmful species to move into new waterways, disrupting ecosystems and costing taxpayers billions. The *SAFE Pathways Act* ensures federal agencies assess these risks and incorporate proven safeguards before constructing new fishways, protecting both our environment and local economies.

The legislation is supported by the North American Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA) and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

"Wisconsin's rivers and lakes are some of our state's greatest resources, and we have a responsibility to protect them," said Rep. Grothman. "Fishways are an important tool to help native species thrive, but if they're poorly designed or located, they can unintentionally create highways for invasive species that devastate our waters, harm wildlife, and cost taxpayers billions in damage and cleanup.

"The SAFE Pathways Act makes sure federal agencies take a hard look at these

risks, plan responsibly, and use proven tools to prevent problems before they start. This is smart, proactive policy that keeps our fisheries healthy, safeguards local economies, and protects our nation's natural resources for generations to come."

"Invasive species pose a tremendous threat to the \$5.1 billion Great Lakes fishery," **said Dr. Marc Gaden, Executive Secretary of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.** *"This legislation will help stop the spread of these harmful species, many of which have caused billions of dollars of damage to our highly valued lakes and tributaries."*

"The SAFE Pathways Act is a smart, forward-looking investment in protecting our native fisheries and the communities that depend on them," **said Christie Trifone Millhouse, Executive Director of NAISMA.** *"By requiring agencies to assess invasive species risks before new fishways are built, this legislation strengthens ecological resilience, safeguards local economies, and helps prevent the costly impacts of invasive species before they take hold."*

Background Information

Fishways allow native fish to navigate around dams and other barriers, supporting population growth and preserving species. However, improperly planned fishways can create pathways for invasive species, which disrupt aquatic ecosystems through predation, habitat destruction, and competition for resources. In 2021, invasive species caused an estimated \$26 billion in lost economic activity across North America.

The SAFE Pathways Act requires federal agencies to evaluate the risk of invasive species before constructing new fishways and incorporate mitigation strategies like biological controls, physical barriers, and targeted design standards. By addressing these risks early, the legislation helps safeguard Wisconsin's fisheries, protect local economies, and reduce costly environmental damage before it happens.