

Protect the Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is our nation's most effective law for protecting wildlife and plants in danger of extinction because it is grounded in science. Since the Act's enactment in 1973, over 95% of species listed under the Act survive, and hundreds are on the path to recovery. Today, scientists estimate that extinction is happening at a rate at least [100 times greater than what is considered normal](#), and half of all species may be at risk of extinction in the next century. In just the last 40 years, we have [lost half of all wild animals on our planet](#). Human-caused habitat destruction, overexploitation of natural resources, pollution, and climate disruption are the primary drivers of the crisis. The ESA is more necessary than ever to stem this tide of extinction and the loss of wildlife all around us. The ESA is also broadly popular—a 2018 [study](#) by researchers at The Ohio State University found that roughly four out of five Americans support the law.

Funding the ESA

The ESA's success is particularly impressive given that the Act has been chronically and severely underfunded for decades. Hundreds of endangered species receive less than \$1,000 a year for their recovery, with many receiving no funding from the Service at all. Because of funding shortfalls, nearly 50 imperiled animals and plants have been declared extinct while waiting for the Act's protections. To truly save species, Congress must fully fund the ESA. This means providing enough funding for the listing program to ensure species are recognized as imperiled, for planning and consultation to ensure basic protections are applied to species, for recovery planning and work to recover species to the point where protections are no longer necessary, and for collaborative work across public and private lands to ensure we work together to protect our natural heritage. Starting in fiscal year 2020, the data show that the FWS requires a budget of \$481 million dollars across five programs to begin to make up for lost ground and put species on the path to recovery.

The Sage-Grouse Rider

The greater sage-grouse is an imperiled western bird and the charismatic ambassador for the Sagebrush Sea, an ecosystem that is vital to fish and wildlife, recreation, communities, and sustainable economic development in eleven western states. As many as 16 million greater sage-grouse once ranged across 297 million acres of sagebrush grasslands. Today, sage-grouse range is half of what it once was, and populations have declined to less than ten percent of historic numbers. In 2010, the FWS found that the greater sage-grouse warranted protection under the ESA, but other priorities precluded the agency from proposing a listing rule at that time. Recognizing the urgent need for conservation action, the Obama administration took the extraordinary step of amending nearly one hundred federal land use plans across the West with new conservation prescriptions for sage-grouse. The FWS later decided not to list the sage-grouse, citing these plans in its decision. However, the Trump administration has revised these plans yet again to allow for more oil and gas drilling and other land uses in critical sage-grouse habitat. Since 2014, Congress has passed a rider in annual Interior appropriations bills blocking the FWS from even considering sage-grouse for protection under the ESA. In light of the recent plan revisions, it is imperative that federal agencies have all available tools to use, as necessary, to address population declines and habitat loss. Scientists at the FWS, not Congress, should be making decisions about which species need protection. The damaging rider should not be included in the FY 2020 Interior appropriations bill.



Infrastructure Affects Wildlife

As Congress moves to address our aging infrastructure, we have an unparalleled opportunity to invest in environmental safeguards and conservation innovations that will ensure American wellbeing and security and create jobs and prosperity for the citizens of today and for future generations. Modern infrastructure projects must be viewed through the lens of wildlife conservation and environmental sustainability, and should meet the following criteria: rely on sustainable or natural materials to increase infrastructure resiliency and longevity; reintroduce or preserve native flora; create resilient and sustainable water and waste management systems, particularly through implementing natural alternatives like wetlands, dune restoration, and natural vegetation



buffers; and reduce wildlife conflict using wildlife corridors and crossings. On our shared public lands, natural areas must be preserved, and efforts must be made to repair (or in some cases remove) infrastructure that poses a threat to ecosystems and public interests. Finally, Congress must reject any efforts to include waivers from fundamental environmental laws such as the ESA and the National Environmental Policy Act in any legislation that authorizes or funds infrastructure, including disaster remediation projects. We urge you to support infrastructure that invests in wildlife and oppose efforts to skirt compliance with bedrock environmental laws.

Climate Change

The protections afforded to species at risk by the ESA have never been more critical given the threats created and exacerbated by climate change. Species extinction is inextricably entwined with the impacts and acceleration of a worsening climate crisis. For instance, shrinking and thinning Arctic sea ice imperils polar bears, ocean acidification damages coral reefs, and extreme weather harms migratory bird populations. The decline of species impacts the future welfare (and even survival) of humans, given our reliance on biodiversity. Species protected under the ESA include pollinators vital for agriculture, amphibians critical to insect-borne disease prevention, and megafauna important for maintaining our lucrative outdoor recreation industry. Furthermore, protecting species and their habitats under the ESA can also help offset the effects of climate change. Designated critical habitat under the law includes areas vital for carbon sequestration, drinking water, clean air, and flood protection. We



urge you to support innovative solutions to the climate crisis that defend the strength of the ESA, highlight its immense benefits, and fully fund its implementation.

Threats to the ESA

Unfortunately, over the past several Congresses there has been an increase in the number of legislative attacks on the ESA. In the 115th Congress alone, [nearly 120 bills and amendments](#) were filed that would undermine this vital law. These pieces of legislation have fallen into several categories: (1) efforts to gut portions of the Act such as citizen enforcement and the use of science; (2) efforts to block ESA protections for particular species including gray wolves, sage-grouse, and grizzly bears; and (3) efforts to block protections for species within certain geographic areas such as the Bay Delta estuary in California. Thankfully, efforts to oppose nearly all these attacks on the ESA have so far been successful. In the 116th Congress we face the continued threat of standalone bills and amendments that would undermine the Act. We urge you to support wildlife and strongly oppose all such efforts to weaken the ESA.

In addition to threats from Congress, endangered species are under unprecedented attack by the Trump administration, via regulations that would severely weaken the ESA. President Trump and Acting Secretary Bernhardt's "Extinction Plan" would weaken endangered species protections by:



- Making it more difficult to extend protections to threatened species, which could delay lifesaving action until a species' population is so small it may be challenging or impossible to save;
- Making it more difficult to protect species like polar bears that are impacted by the effects of climate change;
- Allowing economic factors to be analyzed when deciding if a species should be saved; and
- Making it easier for companies to build roads, pipelines, mines, and other industrial projects in critical habitat areas that are essential to imperiled species' survival.

We urge you to oppose these damaging ESA regulation changes.

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