

**Alaska Wilderness League \* American Bird Conservancy \* American Rivers  
Born Free USA \* Center for Biological Diversity \* Clean Water Action  
Conservation Northwest \* Defenders of Wildlife \* Earthjustice  
Endangered Species Coalition \* Environment America \* Friends of the Earth  
Howling for Wolves \* International Fund for Animal Welfare  
League of Conservation Voters \* National Parks Conservation Association  
National Wolfwatcher Coalition \* Native Plant Conservation Campaign  
Natural Resources Defense Council \* Oceana Oregon Wild \* Rocky Mountain Wild  
Sierra Club \* The Humane Society Legislative Fund \* The Humane Society of the United  
States \* The Wilderness Society \* Turtle Island Restoration Network \* WildEarth  
Guardians \* Wild Virginia \* World Wildlife Fund \* Wyoming Untrapped**

February 15, 2017

The Honorable John Barrasso  
Chairman  
Environment and Public Works Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Carper  
Ranking Member  
Environment and Public Works Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper:

The Senate Environment and Public Works committee meets today for an oversight hearing to discuss the “modernization” of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Given that the ESA has proven highly effective at both saving species from extinction and recovering those that have rebounded as a result of their protection under the law, we strongly believe this is nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt to weaken or perhaps gut one of America’s most popular and effective conservation laws. With this in mind, and for the multitude of reasons outlined below, the undersigned organizations write on behalf of our millions of members and activists to express strong opposition to legislating on the ESA.

To assert that the ESA is in need of “reform” or “modernization” is to overlook the fact that the law has a near-perfect record of success in protecting wildlife in danger of extinction. By U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (FWS) own statistics, the ESA has saved more than 99 percent of listed species from going extinct. In addition, numerous species have been brought back from the brink of extinction and their recovery and delisting has been celebrated as they have moved from the ESA’s protection back to state-led stewardship. Given this incredible success, it should come as no surprise that the ESA is also extremely popular, earning the support of 90 percent of voters. The American public expects that our rich biological heritage will be preserved for future generations to enjoy and the ESA ensures that the nation meets that expectation.

Yet despite the ESA’s proven record of success and immense popularity, members of Congress have repeatedly tried to weaken or gut the law under the guise of reform. In the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress alone, we saw more than 130 individual legislative attacks on the ESA, both to remove protections for specific species and to undermine the law itself. These attacks are often made in the name of corporate

interests, placing short-term economic gain above long-term conservation efforts and demanding changes that would create significant barriers to species protection.

Moreover, industry opponents to the ESA frequently cite statistics that are wholly misrepresentative not only of the law's effectiveness, but of the science behind species recovery. Recovery within a relatively few years is simply inaccurate as a metric for success. Furthermore, species are often only listed under the ESA after decades of decline, and only once they have reached "emergency room status." The ESA saves species by preventing extinction and setting them on the long road to recovery. That is the measure of the law's profound success.

The ESA contains immense flexibility including incidental take permits for land use and other otherwise prohibited activities; cooperative agreements to encourage collaboration and to provide assistance to states for conservation projects; and candidate conservation agreements to avoid the need for a formal ESA listing. This flexibility has repeatedly served to reconcile the imperative to save species from extinction and industry concerns. Further, the framework of the law is flexible enough to make improvements administratively, as has been done numerous times over the years.

Recognizing the proven success, immense popularity, and flexibility provided under the law, there is simply no justifiable explanation for legislative changes to the Endangered Species Act. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

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