



Final Position Statement

The U.S. Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 is a fundamentally sound and vital tool in the U.S. effort to conserve biological diversity. The law has been successful in achieving its primary goal of preventing species extinctions. Very few of the more than 2,400 (as of 2017) species (including subspecies and vertebrate populations) protected by the ESA have been declared extinct. Based on the risk of extinction, it is estimated that many times this number may have become extinct without the ESA.

Although 38 (as of 2017) U.S. species have been declared recovered and removed from the ESA lists, most species are listed because of habitat loss and threats that require significant time, funding, and commitment to reverse through restoration, enhancement, management, or protection. Most plants and animals are listed at a point when the number of populations and their sizes have already reached critically low levels. Identifying and conserving rare and declining species before they reach critically low levels would provide more ecologically, socially, and economically viable options for conservation efforts and would increase the probability and speed of recovery.

For most species, recovery has been historically constrained by insufficient funding levels. Improvements in status of listed species are correlated positively with number of years of protection under the ESA, amount of funding, and number of recovery plan tasks completed. Greater commitment and integration of federal, tribal, state, local, and private resources will be needed to increase the effectiveness of the ESA in achieving its goals of preventing extinction and recovering species.

A more effective ESA must be complemented by broader societal commitments to fully address larger sociocultural and socioeconomic issues that frequently drive species extinction and recovery. A focus of the ESA is on encouraging species recovery through preventing take, broadly defined, of listed species. To continue successfully, the ESA must adapt to also include and encourage proactive measures to identify and conserve critical components of landscapes. Managing and recovering endangered species will be even more challenging in the context of climate change, which may alter natural systems and pose unanticipated threats to some species, requiring re-ordering of priorities for recovery.

The policy of The Wildlife Society regarding the ESA is to:

1. Support maintaining the firm statutory duties and strong substantive standards in the current law and actively promote their consistent interpretation to prevent extinctions and recover species.

2. Support efforts to increase funding for development and effective implementation of recovery plans for listed species.
3. Encourage commitment of greater federal, tribal, regional, state, local, and private resources to the purposes of the ESA through outreach, collaboration, education and support for financial and regulatory incentives.
4. Promote efficient use of existing resources through reducing costs of listing decisions and critical habitat designations and in implementing recovery plans for listed species.
5. Support dedicated federal funding for surveys and monitoring to better estimate the status of species at risk. Upon acceptance of a petition for listing, encourage data sharing from federal, tribal, regional, state, local and private entities to document the species' status.
6. Support adequate funding under Section 6 of the ESA to assist states in building a strong partnership for conservation of candidate species, recovery of threatened and endangered species, and appropriate monitoring of delisted species.
7. Encourage greater partnerships among state fish and wildlife agencies, Native American tribes, local governments, private landowners, and NGOs in carrying out complementary conservation efforts on private and other nonfederal lands to recover listed species and prevent the need to list additional species.
8. Support using scientific expertise to develop recovery plan biological objectives, quantitative interim and final recovery targets, and to assess whether an implementation strategy is likely to achieve biological goals. Involve and use additional stakeholder inputs to help develop implementation strategies to achieve recovery objectives.
9. Encourage federal agencies to expand proactive and consistent efforts at all levels of management to conserve endangered, threatened, and other at-risk species using existing authorities, as required by ESA section 7(a)(1), including soliciting and using the expertise of state fish and wildlife agencies, Native American tribes, and others in a consistent and open manner.
10. Support the designation of critical habitat and measures to restore, enhance, manage, and protect occupied and unoccupied habitats on public lands that are essential to recover endangered and threatened species and work with landowners to achieve the same objectives on private lands. When a species' recovery is deemed dependent on protection of particular habitats, these habitats should be identified in a spatially explicit manner within that species' recovery plan.
11. Support establishment of market-based strategies, for example tax incentives, conservation credits, safe harbor agreements, and expanded use of Farm Bill conservation programs and Interior Department private lands programs, to assist and encourage private landowner actions contributing to recovery of listed species and conservation of candidate species.

12. Encourage federal ESA decision-makers to ensure that decisions under the ESA are transparent and based on robust, rigorous analyses of the best scientific data available.
13. Encourage U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service decisionmakers to work cooperatively with state fish and wildlife agencies and other experts from the scientific community in Section 7 interagency consultations to resolve areas of scientific disagreement or uncertainty during development of biological assessments and to act with the protection of the species foremost when faced with scientific uncertainty about project impacts or the adequacy of offsetting measures.
14. Support strong funding for the State Wildlife Grants program and encourage broad governmental and non-governmental partnerships in the implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans as one mechanism to slow the addition of new species to the federal list of threatened and endangered species.

Approved by Council November 2017. Expires October 2022.