

Improve and Update the Endangered Species Act!

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is more than 30 years old. We have more than 1,300 species in the United States listed as threatened or endangered and less than one percent have recovered sufficiently to be taken off the list. WE CAN DO BETTER! We need to update and improve the ESA to provide new tools and find better, faster ways to make improvements on the ground. We have learned many lessons since the ESA was enacted, and we need to make sure that the ESA recognizes, accommodates and encourages innovative and proactive efforts by private property owners, States and local governments to recover species.

We need to improve and update the ESA by focusing on new and better ways to recover species:

- **Establish Recovery Objectives:** Establishing realistic recovery objectives will give us a goal to work toward, and when that goal is reached, species can be removed from the list.
- **Encourage Voluntary Conservation Efforts:** Voluntary conservation efforts should be promoted by creating new avenues for private property owners to participate proactively in species recovery efforts. These efforts should include creating a habitat reserve program, tax incentives, loan or grant programs, and other initiatives that encourage landowners to voluntarily participate in species conservation efforts. Existing programs like the Safe Harbor Agreements and ESA Mitigation Banks should be codified.
- **Increase State and Local Involvement in Species Recovery Efforts:** We need to take advantage of State and local expertise and abilities by providing more flexibility so that States can facilitate voluntary efforts to protect and enhance species.
- **Increase Funding for Voluntary Programs:** We need to support financially the voluntary programs and State or locally led initiatives that are critical to ensuring species recovery.
- **Encourage Prelisting Measures:** We need to promote collaborative efforts by States, local governments and private parties, such as the sage grouse protection programs, to address species of concern before they have to be listed under the ESA.
- **Strengthen the Critical Habitat Designation Process:** We need to strengthen the critical habitat designation process by ensuring that critical habitat designations are supported by sound decision-making procedures, take into account existing habitat protection measures (such as habitat conservation plans and other state and federal land conservation or species management programs), and rely on timely field survey data.
- **Improve Habitat Conservation Planning (HCP) Process and Codify "No Surprises":** The HCP process has great potential for success, but too often private property owners are stymied by the delays and costs of getting approval. HCP approval should be streamlined. Landowners involved in conservation efforts need to be confident that a "deal is a deal." The "No Surprises" policy must be codified in ESA and cover all commitments by private parties to voluntary protection and enhancement of species and habitat.
- **Ensure an Open and Sound Decision-Making Process:** The administration of ESA must be open to new ideas and data. We need a decision-making process that allows for full public participation, better data collection, and independent scientific review to support decisions made on listings, critical habitat designations and recovery efforts.