
U P D A T E

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This periodic publication is intended solely for the use of NESARC members.

House and Senate leaders announce unprecedented collaboration on ESA. A new approach to improve and update the Endangered Species Act was presented at a news conference last week by House and Senate champions of ESA improvement efforts. House Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo (R-CA), Representative Greg Walden (R-OR), Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Senator Lincoln Chafee (R-RI), chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water, announced a coordinated bipartisan, bicameral partnership on the issue. Statements of support were quickly sent from a range of sources, including Members of the House and Senate from both sides of the aisle, key Administration officials, several Governors, and a variety of other interested groups and organizations. We strongly encourage those NESARC members that have not already done so to send statements commending the partnership to these leaders. The conference was extremely encouraging, and has undoubtedly set the stage for an active year on this important issue. The press conference may be found online at <http://crapo.senate.gov/crapo02102005.ram> (ESA event begins approximately 17 minutes into this feed.) Copies of the various statements may be found at <http://www.nesarc.org/media.htm>

NESARC Membership Update

As prospects for updating the ESA continue to grow, so does interest in NESARC's efforts. We are pleased to announce that the following organizations have joined the Coalition in 2005 to support improving and updating the Act:

- American Forest & Paper Association
- American Forest Resource Council
- CropLife America

Assistant Secretary Manson delivers strong message of Administration support for ESA improvements. Speaking to the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) last week, Craig Manson, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks of the Department of the Interior, called the ESA "outdated public policy technology" that needs to be updated, as would any technology from 1973. In his remarks, Manson discussed the importance of legislative and administrative improvements to the Act, focusing on the importance of the recovery of species and giving states more authority in the recovery process. He stated that both he and Interior Secretary Gale Norton favor these updates, and that they will continue to work to make States a more integral part of the implementation process, to incentivize activities under the Act, and to improve citizen input into recovery plans. Manson praised the work of House and Senate leaders spearheading ESA improvement efforts, as well as the recent efforts of the Western Governors' Association.

Legislation introduced to promote landowner participation in conservation efforts. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman James Inhofe (R-OK) introduced legislation earlier this month that would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to provide assistance to private landowners to restore, enhance, and manage private land to improve fish and wildlife habitats. The "Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act" (S. 260) follows an executive order signed by President Bush in August of 2004 to promote a new approach to conservation within the Federal government's conservation and environmental departments. The Order was issued to ensure that Federal agencies pursue cooperative conservation actions designed to involve private landowners rather than making mandates that private landowners must fulfill. The bill has been referred to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee for consideration.

FWS Seeks proposals from states for 2005 endangered species grants. FWS announced this week that it is seeking proposals from states and U.S. territories interested in acquiring land or conducting conservation planning for endangered species. Through the fiscal year 2005 appropriation from Congress, more than \$70.5 million is available to fund planning activities and land acquisition for federally protected species. The grants are to be awarded from the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund, which provides grants to states and territories to support their participation in a wide array of voluntary conservation projects for listed species, as well as for species that are either proposed or candidates for listing. By law, the state or territory must have a current cooperative agreement with FWS and contribute 25% of the estimated program costs of approved projects, or 10% when two or more states or territories undertake a joint project. The grants are expected to be awarded in the summer of 2005.

FWS spending proposal would cut endangered species funds by \$3 million. The fiscal year 2006 budget request released by the White House contains a \$1.3 billion request for FWS, but would cut funding for endangered species programs by \$3 million. While the FWS budget gives the agency a \$30.9 million increase over its fiscal year 2005 spending level, it puts ESA spending at \$140 million for fiscal year 2006, down from the \$143 million Congress enacted for fiscal year 2005. However, the request itself is higher than what the administration proposed last year for ESA, when the budget proposal was just \$129 million for fiscal year 2005. In the fiscal year 2006 request, critical habitat designations would see an almost \$1.5 million increase and the listing budget would go up by almost half a million. Consultation spending would increase by \$1.3 million over fiscal year 2005 levels. Administration officials said the increases, especially for listings, would be primarily to address litigation-driven workloads. Grant and cost sharing programs saw an increase in the FWS budget request, building on the Administration's backing of cooperative conservation initiatives. Landowner incentive grants come in at \$40 million, almost twice as much as the \$21.7 million they received in fiscal year 2005 funds.

Albuquerque, environmental groups reach deal on Minnows. The city of Albuquerque and environmental groups reached a settlement Wednesday in a five-year legal battle over the endangered *Rio Grande silvery minnow*. Organizations including the Sierra Club and National Audubon Society agreed to pursue no further legal action against the City in exchange for measures they said will help the fish to survive. Under the settlement, Albuquerque will set aside 30,000 acre-feet of water in a city reservoir to help preserve the minnow. The city also agreed to commit \$250,000 from the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Authority and \$25,000 from environmental groups to a water-leasing program for the middle Rio Grande. The program would increase water flow, which will help further protect the minnow and other species. Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM) praised the agreement, expressing encouragement for cooperative efforts to support the minnow without crippling water rights holders on the middle Rio Grande.

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