

MODERNIZING THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

THE ISSUE

Enacted in 1973, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was intended to aid the recovery of plants and wildlife facing extinction. It's an important conservation goal that ranchers, land managers, and citizens take seriously. But the ESA has failed to efficiently achieve this goal. Since its inception, over 2,000 species have been listed as "threatened" or "endangered." Of that number, only 54 have been delisted due to recovery. That's a success rate of less than three percent.

The current ESA process has tipped the scales in favor of agenda-driven groups. Due to the overwhelming numbers of species on the list, the government will commonly miss deadlines involved in ESA processes. These missed deadlines enable radical groups to sue the government and reap taxpayer dollars as compensation through the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA), costing the federal government and taxpayers millions of dollars and draining resources away from real recovery efforts. According to a study by the Mountain States Legal Foundation, a group of eight environmental activist groups filed over 3,300 lawsuits nationwide over a ten-year period.

WHY RANCHERS ARE CRITICAL

For generations, livestock producers have been dedicated to improving the health of landscapes where wildlife call home. Simply put, their livelihoods depend on it. Ranchers take great pride in their responsibility as conservationists and land managers and play an integral role in species conservation and recovery.

THE PATH FORWARD

In 2015 the Western Governors Association (WGA) launched an initiative bringing together diverse stakeholders to discuss ways to improve the ESA. The result was a bipartisan resolution outlining policy recommendations to Congress. These recommendations are intended to be the foundation for any statutory changes to ESA.

PLC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adoption of WGA recommendations
- Greater transparency of listing petitions and litigation
- Support the ability of agencies to delist recovered species
- Consider economic impact in critical habitat listing decisions
- Partner with ranchers to achieve conservation goals



Bottom line: The Endangered Species Act, in its current form, is failing. Modernization can ensure dollars and resources are directed toward real recovery efforts, while partnerships with ranchers provide necessary on-the-ground support to threatened or endangered species.

