



National Cattlemen's
Beef Association



The Honorable John Barrasso, MD
Chairman, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

The Public Lands Council (PLC), the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), and the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) would like to express our support for the Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018. PLC is the only national organization dedicated solely to representing the roughly 22,000 ranchers who hold federal grazing permits and operate on federal lands. NCBA is the beef industry's oldest and largest national marketing and trade association representing American cattlemen and women who provide much of the nation's supply of food and own or manage a large portion of America's private property. ASI has been the national trade organization representing the interests of nearly 90,000 sheep ranchers located throughout the country who produce America's lamb and wool since 1865. ASI is a federation of forty-five state sheep associations representing a diverse industry.

According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, "the purpose of the ESA is to protect and recover imperiled species and the ecosystems upon which they depend." While a laudable and important goal, data indicates that fewer than 2% of the species listed under the Act since its inception have been successfully recovered. What was originally intended to be a wildlife recovery program has instead become a toolbox of litigation-ready opportunities for agenda-driven outside groups and individuals to exert control over proper policy making. Policies and mandates, often crafted by legal settlement rather than scientific data, have become the norm.

This top-down approach is a key contributor to the ESA's abysmal success rate and its burden on local communities and land managers. As a result, groups across the political and conservation spectrum have called for updates to the ESA aimed at solving these problems. The gold standard for tackling this challenge has been the Western Governors Association's bipartisan resolution – passed after years of collaboration with impacted stakeholders including local governments, environmental interest groups, and industry leaders – calling on Congress to make the ESA work for the 21st Century by putting more decision-making authority in the hands of the locals who interact with species most frequently.

The Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018 takes a critical step forward in modernizing the ESA by doing just that – giving more power to state and local governments to make decisions based on their area's unique landscapes, individual needs, and conditions on the ground. This emphasis on local involvement ensures that those with firsthand knowledge of a habitat area can provide critical insights to the creation of recovery plans. Furthermore, locals are the best equipped to predict, assess, and quickly react to changing conditions for the benefit of species.

As the nation's largest non-governmental bloc of land managers, ranchers take great pride in their integral role in species conservation and recovery. For generations, livestock producers have been dedicated to improving the health of landscapes where wildlife call home. Over the years, they have grown frustrated by the lack of commonsense ESA implementation and being put on the sidelines while those decisions are made. This legislation will help bring them back to the table to craft recovery plans that are workable and produce favorable results.

PLC, NCBA, and ASI appreciate the opportunity to provide our input on behalf of our members – the nation's food and fiber producers. We urge swift passage of the Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018.

Sincerely,



Kevin Kester
President
National Cattlemen's Beef Assn.



Dave Eliason
President
Public Lands Council



Mike Corn
President
American Sheep Industry Assn.