

Friends of Blackwater's Statement to West Virginia's Congressional Delegation

Stop Extinction Day, August 10th 2018

The Endangered Species Act:

Protecting West Virginia Wildlife

West Virginia is home to many rare and unique species. The West Virginia Northern Flying Squirrel, Cheat Mountain Salamander, Indiana Bat, and many other wild and wonderful species have benefitted from the protection of the Endangered Species Act, one of our bedrock environmental laws. The Endangered Species Act is supported by 90% of voters, and 99% of species listed have been saved from extinction. Wildlife viewing is a popular activity, with roughly 850,000 people participating in West Virginia, generating over \$320 million in expenditures, according to a 2011 report by the Fish and Wildlife Service.



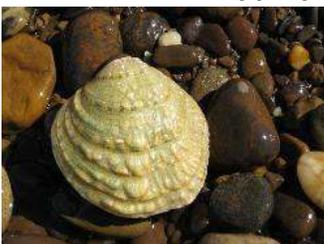
Unfortunately, right now the Endangered Species Act faces a number of threats. These new proposals will weaken the Act under the guise of attempted reform. **We are asking you to resist attempts to weaken the Endangered Species Act.**

Political Threats to Endangered Species

-Farm Bill Riders: The version of the Farm Bill passed by the House contains steep cuts to beneficial conservation programs, gutting programs that help farmers create wildlife-friendly working landscapes. It also contains a provision that exempts agricultural pesticides from analysis and consultation procedures, which sets a dangerous precedent. The Senate version of the Farm Bill takes a much more moderate approach, preserving most of the conservation funding and the pesticide protections. The huge differences between the two bills must now be resolved in a conference committee, and we hope that the final version retains the good elements of the Senate bill.



-Cuts to Interior Appropriations: Another major spending bill in progress is the FY19 Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill. Right now both the House and Senate versions of this bill contain cuts to the Endangered Species listing program, although the Senate makes a smaller cut than the House. The House version also includes cuts to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a popular program that protects important habitat and scenic areas, while the Senate version does not. The Endangered Species Act is already underfunded, and cuts in this area will only make the situation worse.



Please maintain the current level of funding for Endangered Species Act programs.

-Endangered Species Act Amendment Bill: Senator Barrasso has introduced new legislation proposing to amend the Endangered Species Act. This bill transfers an enormous amount of power to appointed state officials, straining states' resources and opening up the process of species restoration to more partisan political influence. Existing law already provides a role for states, and the healthy relationship between agencies like the Fish and Wildlife Service and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources makes this change unnecessary. This bill also undercuts public involvement, shielding state data from public access and removing public notice requirements for certain actions. Public accountability is a key piece of the Endangered Species Act, and these public access issues should be non-controversial. This bill offers no substantive benefits for wildlife, and should not move forward.



-Interior Department Regulatory Rollbacks: The Interior Department has proposed a sweeping new set of regulatory changes that would undermine the Endangered Species Act. These new changes would allow for the “taking” or killing of threatened species, unless a species-specific rule has been written. Under current law, species designated as threatened are assumed to be protected whether or not a species-specific rule has been generated, which prevents any harm coming to the species during the often lengthy process of writing a rule. These regulatory changes would also reduce inter-agency consultation and introduce economic considerations into listing decisions in a way that was never the intent of the original law. Although Congress is not directly involved in making these rules, they can still express opposition through an open letter or other public communications.



About Us

Friends of Blackwater is a conservation non-profit based in Tucker County West Virginia. We have a robust membership base both within and beyond the state of West Virginia, including 1,000 donors, 5,000 digital newsletter subscribers, and nearly 3,500 Facebook followers. Our members are interested in issues relating to habitat preservation, species conservation, and biodiversity—and they vote.



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