

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
NOAA FISHERIES ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR JANET COIT**

**FOR A HEARING ENTITLED
“ESA AT 50: THE DESTRUCTIVE COST OF THE ESA”**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER,
WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES**

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Chairman Bentz, Ranking Member Huffman, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is responsible for the stewardship of the nation’s living marine resources and their habitat. Backed by sound science and an ecosystem-based approach to management, NOAA Fisheries provides vital services for the nation, including management and sustainment of our fisheries, ensuring safe sources of seafood, and the recovery and conservation of protected species and healthy ecosystems. The resilience of our marine ecosystems and coastal communities depends on healthy marine species, including protected species such as whales, sea turtles, salmon, and corals. Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), NOAA Fisheries works to recover marine and anadromous species while preserving robust economic and recreational opportunities. There are more than 160 endangered and threatened marine and anadromous species under NOAA’s jurisdiction. Our work includes: listing species under the ESA, monitoring species status, designating critical habitat, implementing actions to recover endangered and threatened species, consulting with other federal agencies, conserving marine mammals, developing ESA policies, guidance, and regulations, and working with partners to conserve and recover listed species. NOAA Fisheries shares the responsibility of implementing the ESA with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the ESA. Recognizing that the value of our natural heritage is incalculable, Congress enacted the ESA nearly unanimously in 1973, in acknowledgement of the broad public support for the prevention of species extinction. The ESA is the nation’s foremost conservation law for protecting wildlife and plants in danger of extinction. It plays a critical, science-based role in preventing the extinction of imperiled species, promoting their recovery, and conserving their habitats. Its purpose and goals remain as relevant today as they were 50 years ago, or perhaps more so. Today, the impacts of climate change pose an ever-increasing threat to native biodiversity. Scientists estimate that as many as one million species are threatened with extinction.

The ESA has been remarkably successful in preventing the extinction of 99% of the species listed under the Act, recovering some of America's most iconic species, and putting many on the road to recovery. From Eastern Pacific gray whales to humpback whales along the Atlantic coast, NOAA Fisheries, in carrying out its statutorily mandated responsibilities pursuant to the ESA, has been integral to species recovery and efforts to remove species from the Threatened and Endangered Lists.

Recovering species can provide economic opportunities such as enhanced fishing and recreating opportunities, wildlife-based tourism, and responsible wildlife watching. NOAA Fisheries protects marine species while supporting ocean-based economic growth by providing scientific advice on the impacts to protected marine species and their habitat from near-term and long-term effects of competing ocean uses.

To continue to carry out ESA's important goals, NOAA Fisheries works closely with its many partners, including states, tribes, other federal agencies, industries, and conservation organizations in its efforts to conserve and recover ESA-listed species. These efforts include implementing our "Species in the Spotlight" initiative, which we began in 2015 to bring greater attention to, and leverage resources and partnerships to save, nine of our highly at-risk species. The nine species in the spotlight are: Atlantic salmon, Cook Inlet beluga whale, Hawaiian monk seal, Sacramento River winter run Chinook salmon, southern resident killer whale, the Pacific leatherback turtle, central California coast coho salmon, North Atlantic right whale, and white abalone. The Species in the Spotlight Program has been tremendously successful in leveraging new partnerships and resources for conservation and recovery of these species.

Through use of our Section 6 grants, we have also partnered with many coastal states to support management, research, monitoring, and outreach activities that have direct conservation benefits for listed species under the ESA within those states. Through this grant program, states have undertaken critical management and recovery activities and conducted vital research for endangered species as varied as white abalone, Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon, marine turtles, and Hawaiian monk seals. In addition, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act are providing historic funding to support state, tribal and local efforts to conserve habitats that support listed species. With funding provided under these laws, we are able to support and catalyze fish passage projects that restore access to healthy habitat for migratory fish, habitat restoration projects that support fisheries and protected species while also strengthening the resilience of coastal ecosystems and communities, and capacity building and on-the-ground restoration projects that advance the coastal habitat restoration priorities of tribes and underserved communities.

We also continue to seek science-based innovations to address threats to species and support their recovery in ways that can minimize risks to species and costs to industry. One such new initiative—the Advanced Sampling and Technology for Extinction Risk Reduction and

Recovery—focused on reducing extinction risk and supporting recovery of protected species through technological innovation. New and better data is also critical to our efforts.

Our work with partners to conserve and recover threatened and endangered species is ongoing and evolving. Over the past few decades, we have improved our implementation of the statute, which has resulted in the recovery of species and prevention of species extinctions. We continually seek to expand our partnerships and cooperative conservation efforts, and improve and strengthen our implementation of the ESA to bring greater benefits to listed species and surrounding communities. For instance, a recent NOAA partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency has provided communities with incentives for taking local actions that both mitigate flood risk to homeowners and businesses, and protect ESA-listed species through preservation of the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains, resulting in lower flood insurance premiums and reduced property damage and loss from flooding.

Over the past 50 years, the ESA has led to innovation, conservation and science to support species and the habitats on which they depend. Healthy ecosystems support fisheries, tourism and community health. By promoting conservation of habitats and preventing the loss of biodiversity, the ESA has provided myriad benefits across the nation, and beyond. The United States is a model for others as we seek to support economic development while ensuring the continued existence of the species, great and small, with which we share our earth.

Conclusion

NOAA is proud to continue to lead the world in conducting ocean science, serve the nation's coastal communities and industries, ensure responsible stewardship of our ocean and coastal resources, and foster economic growth and opportunity by recovering marine resources to sustainable levels and providing scientific advice on the impacts to protected marine species and their habitat from near-term and long-term effects of competing ocean uses. We value the opportunity to continue working with this Subcommittee on these important issues. Thank you, Members of the Subcommittee and your staff, for your work to support NOAA's mission. I am happy to respond to your questions.