



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Doc Hastings

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CONTACT: [Press Office](#)
202-226-9019

Witnesses: Endangered Species Act Must be Improved to Better Protect both Species and Local Economies

Field hearings highlight local and state conservation efforts

Billings, Montana - Today, the House Natural Resources Committee held two Full Committee field [hearings](#) in Casper, Wyoming and Billings, Montana on “*State and Local Efforts to Protect Species, Jobs, Property, and Multiple Use Amidst a New War on the West.*” At these hearings, witnesses discussed how federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings can impact local jobs and the economy and how federal litigation often stands in the way of successful local and state recovery efforts.

The Natural Resources Committee has held a series of hearings on the ESA and House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings this year announced the creation of the [Endangered Species Act Congressional Working Group](#). These field hearings are part of the Committee’s efforts to hear directly from local entities and private landowners on ways in which the ESA works well and how it could be improved.

“Ramped up ESA listings and habitat designations through executive orders and closed-door settlements with litigious groups are wreaking havoc on private landowners, multiple use, agriculture, rural economies, rural timber communities, energy producers, and even states’ own species conservation activities,” said Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04). “Rather than ensuring the federal government cooperates with states ‘to the maximum extent practicable,’ on major actions affecting land or water within states’ borders as ESA requires, this Administration is allowing ‘sue and settle’ to dictate how federal agencies use taxpayer-funded resources and how they prioritize endangered species activities.”

“It is so important that we get it right when it comes to making listing decisions. We need sound science, and open data that can be replicated. We need innovative, collaborative approaches to wildlife management that offer incentives for sound management. We need a clear distinction in our minds about what constitutes conservation: on the ground stewardship, or repeated court battles. We need a common understanding of what constitutes success when it comes to the Endangered Species Act,” said Rep. Cynthia Lummis (WY-At Large). “In short, we need a new 21st Century conservation ethic that is not clouded by accusations and rancor. We can and should do better for our wildlife.”

“Our wide variety of wildlife and the environment that supports it are central to our way of life in Montana, for better or for worse ... Our lands, living in concert with our diverse wildlife, allow us to grow commodities that feed the world, develop minerals that provide economic security for our state and jobs for our kids, and provide recreational opportunities that are second to none ... We want to keep the ESA from being used as a tool to obstruct positive species and resource management and allow the people, not bureaucrats in Washington or Judges in the 9th Circuit, to determine how our environment and our resource economies can flourish together,” **said Rep Steve Daines (MT-At Large).**

Witnesses at today’s hearings all agreed that this law needs to be updated in order to make sure it works in the best interest of both species and local communities:

“Montana farmers and ranchers are extremely frustrated with the Endangered Species Act. It is like a treadmill to landowners and producers. We spend an inordinate amount of time and effort in order to keep species from being listed, only to have them listed anyway. Once listed, delisting goals are moving targets. When delisting targets are reached, delisting is further delayed by court cases. Habitat control takes precedence over species conservation. Conservation of one species leads to the degradation of another... When we start playing God to one species, there is no place to stop until the federal government controls the entire west.” – [**Matt Knox, Montana Farm Bureau Federation**](#)

“I firmly believe that species conservation is a community-driven effort that strives to work with individuals, groups, and agencies to achieve a goal. It is essential that addressing species, such as sage grouse, is a grassroots effort, not a top down approach.”
– [**Lesley Robinson, County Commissioner, Phillips County, Montana**](#)

“I think we’d all agree with Congress’ worthy intentions when passing the Endangered Species Act. However, we must make sure that any actions to save a species also takes into consideration the human impact. The Endangered Species Act should not force us to choose wildlife over humans and the economic opportunity necessary to my family and my tribe...Good paying jobs do not have to come at the expense of the environment. We can have both. As a heavy equipment operator for a coal mining company and a member of the Crow Tribe, I know we are already accomplishing both.”
– [**Channis Whiteman, Crow Tribe Member**](#)

“The energy industry, tourism industry, and agricultural industry is the three legged stool that provides a robust and healthy economy. These industries produce good paying jobs for Wyoming citizens. They also help us pay our bills and put money in the bank for a ‘rainy day.’ As it is currently implemented, the ESA is too far reaching in its impacts on both the species it seeks to protect and the lives it impacts to allow so many of these impacts to be left to the regulatory and judicial process. After 40 years, the need for greater Congressional direction is abundantly clear and that should be that the conservation of species is necessarily best accomplished by those closest to the resource.” – [**Rob Hendry, County Commissioner, Natrona County, Wyoming**](#)

“I believe that collaborative processes are a great tool for increasing the success of the implementation of the Endangered Species Act. The Wyoming Plan is an example of a

win-win plan for everyone.”

- [Meghan O'Toole Lally, Sheep & Cattle Rancher, Savery, Wyoming](#)

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