

Testimony of Peter Illyn  
Concerning the Endangered Species Act

Committee on Resources  
Legislative Resources  
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My name is Peter Illyn. I'm here today to testify about the biblical principles of environmental stewardship and how these relate to the protection of endangered species. I have read the bills that are being discussed here today. I realize that I am not a scientist and cannot accurately testify about the specific aspects concerning scientific analysis. I am, however, a preacher. I would like to discuss the theology of creation care and how this is becoming a growing movement within the church.

I spent 10 years as a minister and a preacher in the Foursquare Church, a conservative evangelical denomination. I am now the Executive Director for a ministry called Restoring Eden. I live in SW Washington, and spent five years as a professional outfitter in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. I also do some networking with churches in the Klamath Basin. I am well aware of the recent events in both places.

I am humbled to be here today as I recognize the difficulty of your task. The protection of endangered species is a very complex and interwoven problem. Most potential solutions have ecological, political and/or economic ramifications. But as I travel through-out the country speaking about the call to care for God's creation, I am amazed at what I see and what I hear. Thousands upon thousands of Christians have recognized that extinction of species is first and foremost a moral issue.

The Bible is clear on this subject. Humans have no right to wipe out that which God called "good."

In Genesis we read:

That God made the different species (and called them good.)

That God blessed the different species (and told them to fill the earth.)

That God protected the different species.

And that God made a covenant with the different species.

In Psalms we read two more biblical and theological truths.

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. (Psalm 24:1).

"In wisdom you made them all, the earth is full of your creatures." (Psalm 104:24)

These scriptures reveal the heart and the will of God as it relates to the protection of biodiversity. In wisdom and in goodness, God created, blessed, protected and made a covenant with the all the different species. God called them to fruitfulness; to fill the earth. We are a part of creation, but we are not the point of creation.

God entrusted us to tend and keep the garden. We are allowed, even expected, to eat from the fruitful

bounty of God's garden. But we have no right to trample the garden; to destroy the fruitfulness, to blaspheme the wisdom of God expressed in biodiversity.

Extinction isn't stewardship. It is sin caused by our arrogance, our ignorance and our greed. I'm part of a grassroots Christian movement that is taking place in churches and in college campuses through-out the country. We are Bible-believing Christians who recognized that we have a God-given responsibility; yea, a moral duty, to be stewards of the earth.

We are seeing the beginning of a new morality, one that will be used by future generations to judge the environmental decisions made by this committee and enacted by this Congress. We do not stand alone in this. Almost every major denomination in the country has a position condemning the human caused extinction of species.

Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church writes, "To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin. For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation, ....these things are sins."

And the Rev. Billy Graham is quoted as saying, "It is not right for us to destroy the world God has given us. He has created everything; as the Bible says, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven" (Acts 17:24) To drive to extinction something He created is wrong. He has a purpose for everything. We Christians have a responsibility to take the lead in caring for the earth. The Lord said we are to look after his Garden," and he said "we are responsible for it."

In the past few years, our ministry, Restoring Eden, has developed relationships at over 40 Christian colleges. We have members in hundreds of churches through-out the country. Our call is simple. God is a good God. God made a good earth. And God calls us to be good stewards.

Thank you.

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The testimony will discuss the biblical and moral arguments for good stewardship as it relates to the Endangered Species Act.