

Opening Statement of Rep. Pete Olson  
Committee on Natural Resources  
July 19, 2017

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Committee—thank you for having me today and for exploring this important issue.

Texans value their open spaces. We value the land and the animals large and small we have on it. Texas is defined by that heritage, and it is a legacy I intend to leave to my children.

We need to protect our endangered species, but we need to do it in a smart way.

Arbitrary deadlines do not help. Neither do sweeping listings that threaten the communities and landowners who have been on that land since before the time states like mine were created.

That is why I thank you for taking a look at H.R. 717, the Listing Reform Act.

My bill is designed to be part of a suite of changes you all can consider.

First, it seeks to end arbitrary deadlines and make sure that the government acts as quickly as is *possible*. As this Committee said in its 2014 report on the ESA, “Witnesses have testified that timeframes provided currently under ESA are not feasible, and that groups are litigating not over whether a species ought to be listed, but that the federal government can’t comply with rigid 90-day or 12-month timeframes set by ESA”.<sup>1</sup>

It also makes sure that de-listing petitions don’t get punted to the end of the line. As we have seen with species like the Grizzly<sup>2</sup>, these de-listing petitions can drag on for years after a species is recovered and could be protected locally.

My goal with this bill is a chance for the federal government to triage listing decisions. Let’s work through the petitions in a way that makes sense for the species, not just on arbitrary deadlines that leave us open to lawsuits.

The bill also adds a new class of listing determinations. Under current law, the government can say that listing a species might be warranted but has to be “precluded” for the time being. My bill expands on that and says that the listing of a species that might be threatened can be “precluded” if listing would lead to certain serious damages. But if new information comes in or if the species is slipping towards endangered status, all bets are off.

In the interim, states and locals can continue to manage their resources and protect species without the federal hammer coming down.

I do not want to see species go extinct. But, what I am trying to achieve is a balance that gives our wildlife the protection they deserve in a way that protects local communities too.

---

<sup>1</sup> Endangered Species Act Congressional Working Group [“Report, Findings and Recommendations”](#) (2014)

<sup>2</sup> Natural Resources Committee, [“Bishop: Grizzly Delisting Process Emblematic of Need for ESA Reform”](#) (2017)

We can do both. We can update the law without endangering our legacy for the next generation. I think H.R. 717 is a step in that direction.

I thank you Mr. Chairman, and yield back the balance of my time.