



**Written Testimony
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**Submitted to the House Energy and Minerals
Resources Subcommittee
June 16, 2005**

**Hearing on The Impact of the Endangered Species Act
on Energy and Mineral Development:
The Wildlands Project.**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments. The Wildlands Project has a small staff, and due to previous commitments, we are not able to be present at the hearing. We trust this statement will answer your questions about the Wildlands Project, our views on the Endangered Species Act, and related matters.

The Wildlands Project: Mission and Goals

The Wildlands Project is an organization of scientists and citizens deeply concerned about the loss of species and the degradation of ecosystems. These losses not only imperil our natural heritage, but also threaten the long term health of our society and economy. The Wildlands Project is dedicated to bringing the best science to bear on these problems and using that science as a foundation for collaborative solutions that restore and protect our nation's biological health. Through the science of conservation biology and dedication to the Wildlands Project's mission--to protect and restore the natural heritage of North America through the establishment of a connected system of wildlands--we are demonstrating practical and achievable opportunities to bring a natural, healthy balance back to our faltering ecosystems. We believe that healthy environments mean healthy futures for people, wildlife, and the places they call home.

The Wildlands Project's Collaborative Approach to Conservation

The Wildlands Project's accomplishments are globally recognized for their scientific credibility, inclusiveness, and results-based orientation. The vehicle for achieving our conservation goals of protecting and restoring native species and ecosystem health is a series of "Wildlands Networks" that connect existing and proposed protected lands with one another via wildlife corridors. The elements that comprise Wildlands Network conservation plans--mapping of protected areas and landscape connections, native species analysis, and proposals for management of lands and waters -- is based on rigorous, peer-reviewed science.

Our credibility as conservation plan "implementers" is based upon the Wildlands Project's ability to build bridges between various stakeholders. Because large-landscape-scale Wildlands Network planning encompasses both public and private lands, managed by a wide range of local, state, Native American, and federal governments, and private owners, the Wildlands Project views the collaborative approach to conservation as essential.

Examples of our collaborative efforts include:

- Workshops bringing private property owners in conservation planning areas together with state and federal agencies, and private organizations that offer advice and financial incentives for landowners to conserve the ecological values of their properties. These opportunities assist landowners in maintaining traditional operations and ownership while providing enhanced habitat for wildlife.
- The Wildlands Project-sponsored Border Ecological Symposium held this year in Tucson focused on the impact of border security infrastructure and activities on cross-border wildlife movement. The symposium was attended by representatives of the US Border Patrol, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, University of Arizona scientists, conservation organizations, and elected officials, including staff from the offices of US Representative Raul Grijalva, US Senator John McCain, and US Senator Jon Kyle. The symposium has generated ongoing dialogue among these parties, conservation organizations (including the Wildlands Project), and the Department of Homeland Security.
- Support for and participation in the Arizona Wildlife Linkage Working Group, a collaboration among Arizona Department of Transportation, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Federal Highway Administration, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management to design a state-wide wildlife linkage map to be used in planning future wildlife highway crossing structures.

Collaboration among this wide range of stakeholders generates effective and achievable solutions to conservation challenges--solutions in which public and private decision makers can have a high degree of confidence.

Achieving the goals set out in Wildlands Network conservation plans will require many decades and the efforts of ensuing generations of Americans. We see our task as beginning the process now, before more natural diversity is lost. No American wants to tell the next generation that it will never see wild salmon or grizzlies in their natural homes because we failed to care about our natural heritage.

There are short-term benefits to Wildlands conservation planning as well, including the enormous contribution made to local economies by wildlife- and nature-related amenities, and the prevention of a further decline in species resulting in listings under the Endangered Species Act. The Wildlands Project-inspired collaborations now underway are key to averting the habitat destruction and fragmentation that underlie such listings.

The Wildlands Project and the Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act represents the best of America. It is a strong statement of our nation's values. We are a people who treasure nature. Many Americans come to this value based on religious belief. Protecting God's creation is an important part of their faith. Other Americans see our wildlands as the theater of evolution, home to the

processes that ultimately sustain all human societies both materially and spiritually. For most Americans, it is both.

The Endangered Species Act plays an integral role in protecting natural diversity, and it has been extremely effective at doing so. The world's most respected scientists tell us that we are in the midst of a great, human caused extinction episode rivaling several pre-historic extinctions caused by natural events. We are losing species at more than 1000 times the historic background rate. As the eminent biologist, Michael Soulé, said, it is "not just about the death of species, but about the death of birth." The Endangered Species Act is the miner's canary. It sounds the alarm when harm threatens. It allows us to prevent extinction. Because of the Endangered Species Act, we still have bald eagles—the symbol of our nation—plus wolves, grizzlies, California condors, salmon, and hundreds of other magnificent native species.

The Endangered Species Act is a safety net for wildlife, plants, and fish that are on the brink of extinction. We owe it to our children and grandchildren to be good stewards of our environment and leave behind undiminished the great natural legacy that we inherited from previous generations. We all know that one of the most effective ways to protect that natural legacy is to protect the places where vulnerable species live.

According to recent polling, 86% of Americans believe in a strong Endangered Species Act. It is one of the most popular laws in our nation's history. The Wildlands Project shares this view. We are working with communities to design habitat conservation approaches that will help protect species where they live before they become endangered. Defensive tactics to save species are often required, but we must do more to get ahead of the curve. Therefore, the Wildlands Project advocates for a stronger Endangered Species Act that has as its centerpiece scientifically credible requirements for critical habitat protection because, in order to protect species, we must protect their homes.

The Endangered Species Act is a powerful tool to protect our natural heritage—a heritage Americans clearly want protected. Although the Wildlands Project rarely litigates and does not lobby, we see the Act as essential to conservation and maintaining the quality of life in America.

The Wildlands Project and Energy Development

Wildlands Project conservation planning is aimed at achieving conservation goals. Our plans provide for both strictly protected areas and for "compatible use areas" where some types of resource extraction can occur based on their impacts to species and ecosystem processes. The debate over potential conflicts between protecting ecologically important lands and developing them for energy and mineral resources has a long history. We find highly instructive the thoughts of a previous, conservation-minded Republican President, Teddy Roosevelt:

"Optimism is a good characteristic, but if carried to excess, it becomes foolishness. We are prone to speak of the resources of this country as inexhaustible; this is not so."
(Annual message to Congress of 1907)

Comment [CCSR1]: I have been using "Stewardship Lands", a term coined by Steve Trombulak, in place of compatible use areas. Here's how he defines it: "Stewardship lands, where the primary designation for the land is the extraction of natural resources following best management practices, refined and improved over time, allowing for the sustainable use and extraction of resources such as food crops, animals, and timber." The reference is attached.

"Defenders of the short-sighted men who in their greed and selfishness will, if permitted, rob our country of half its charm by their reckless extermination of all useful and beautiful wild things sometimes seek to champion them by saying the 'the game belongs to the people.' So it does; and not merely to the people now alive, but to the unborn people. The 'greatest good for the greatest number' applies to the number within the womb of time, compared to which those now alive form but an insignificant fraction. Our duty to the whole, including the unborn generations, bids us restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of wild life and the larger movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose, and method."
(*A Book-Lover's Holidays in the Open*, 1916)

The Wildlands Project and Our Detractors

The success of the Wildlands Project in promoting continental conservation through the design and implementation of Wildlands Network conservation plans has, as have all innovative new approaches to major societal challenges, garnered detractors. In the case of the Wildlands Project, criticism aimed at us has often been unusually overstated. Maps published and copyrighted by the Wildlands Project have been re-drawn and distributed with erroneous, misleading content. Websites have been created that not only misrepresent our goals and products, but have actually claimed to be our own official website. Claims have even been made--completely without basis in fact--that we are representatives of the United Nations, working to impose the Convention on Biodiversity. The Wildlands Project's materials, maps, and conservation work can be found at our website, www.wildlandsproject.org.

Thank you for allowing us to provide these comments to the subcommittee.