



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (Time 3:27)

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This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

Since life began on Earth, countless creatures have come and gone, rendered extinct by naturally changing physical and biological conditions. While extinctions occur naturally and will continue to do so, there is a growing body of scientific evidence suggesting that the current rate of species extinction is much higher than the *background rate*, or natural rate, of the past.

The current rate and extent of species loss and endangerment can be directly attributed to human activities. Biologists estimate that since the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620, more than 500 species, subspecies, and varieties of our Nation's plants and animals have gone extinct.

The rapid loss of species throughout the years has not gone unnoticed. Congress expressed concern that many of our Nation's native plants and animals were in danger of becoming extinct by passing the *Endangered Species Preservation Act* in 1966, and then a more comprehensive law, the *Endangered Species Act*, in 1973.

The purpose of the Endangered Species Act, or ESA, is to protect and recover imperiled species, and to preserve the ecosystems upon which these species depend.

The ESA is jointly administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has primary responsibility for terrestrial and freshwater organisms, while the responsibilities of the National Marine Fisheries Service are mainly marine wildlife such as whales and anadromous fish such as salmon.

Under the ESA, species may be listed as either endangered or threatened. “Endangered” means a species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. “Threatened” means a species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

More than 1,300 species of plants and animals are currently listed as either threatened or endangered in the United States.

While extinction is still a real threat for many species, there is hope. Conservation actions carried out in the United States under the Endangered Species Act have been successful in preventing extinction for 99 percent of the species that are listed as endangered or threatened.

So why do we study endangered species and learn about endangered species conservation? There are several reasons:

Endangered and threatened species of wildlife and plants are of ecological, historical, esthetic, recreational, and scientific value to us all. Ultimately, these species are a part of the complex web of life that supports us every day.

For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Sarah Leon.