

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Endangered & Threatened Species



Preventing Extinction ... Achieving Recovery



Grizzly bear/USFWS



Desert tortoise/USFWS



Karner blue/USFWS



Gila trout/USFWS

The Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) was enacted in 1973 to prevent the loss or harm of endangered and threatened species and to preserve the ecosystems upon which these species depend. As one of our Nation's most important conservation statutes, the ESA has improved the status of declining species throughout the United States and has served as a model for international conservation efforts.

Our Nation's rich diversity of fish, wildlife, and plant resources symbolizes America's wealth and promise. The ESA represents a firm commitment to protect and preserve our natural heritage out of a deeply held understanding of the direct link between the health of our ecosystems and our own well-being.

All Americans can take pride in the fact that, under the ESA, the California condor, grizzly bear, Okaloosa darter, whooping crane, and black-footed ferret were brought back from the brink of extinction. We can also celebrate that many other species no longer need the Act's protection and were removed from the list of threatened and endangered species, including the bald eagle, the very symbol of our Nation's strength; the Robbins' cinquefoil, a diminutive wildflower discovered in the Appalachian Mountains by early explorers; and the Tinian monarch, a small Pacific island forest bird.

Although we have made considerable progress in safeguarding our imperiled species and ecosystems since the passage of the ESA, the challenge we face is ongoing. Our growth into a nation of more than 300 million people inevitably creates more threats to the health and well-being of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources that sustain us economically, aesthetically, and recreationally. Ensuring that America's threatened and endangered species continue to be protected and recovered requires a renewed commitment by all of us to maintain a strong, effective ESA—one that is responsive to both the needs of our imperiled resources and the concerns of our citizens.

Our Mission

We provide leadership on behalf of the American people in recovering and conserving our Nation's imperiled species by implementing innovative and effective conservation programs, fostering partnerships, demonstrating scientific excellence, and developing a workforce of dedicated conservation professionals.

Our Approach

Just as America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, saving endangered and threatened species is a shared responsibility. The ESA itself recognizes that the task cannot be accomplished by any single entity. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will improve implementation of the ESA by strengthening our partnerships with States and local governments, other Federal agencies, Tribes, non-governmental organizations, industry, academia, and private landowners. Equally important, we commit to continuously find new ways to work with America's citizenry on imperiled species conservation and recovery. We will build trust by listening to the ideas of others, learning from other's experiences, and collaborating in the development of innovative approaches and a shared vision that will yield lasting results.

As We Work In Partnership With Others, Our Two Major Goals Are To:

1. Protect species in need and then pursue their recovery;
2. Conserve candidate species and species-at-risk so that listing under the ESA is not necessary.

Our Vision

To make recovery efforts for listed and candidate species more efficient and effective, we will work with others to find ways to invigorate and modernize the implementation of the ESA, using our current conservation tools and developing new ones at every opportunity. Among the tools that will play a major part in achieving our conservation and recovery goals are:

- Species assessments, rule makings, 5-year reviews
- Recovery plans
- Interagency consultations
- Habitat conservation planning
- Safe Harbor Agreements
- Conservation agreements
- Conservation banks
- Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (Section 6) Grants

Many of these tools involve incentives to encourage and reward the conservation efforts of private landowners whose efforts have significantly contributed to the success of the ESA. We will continually refine our tools to help protect landowners' interests and promote endangered species conservation.

Addressing Climate Change

New challenges lie ahead in the conservation of threatened and endangered species as a result of climate change. Because many imperiled species are already surviving at the limits of their ecological tolerance, the additional stress of a rapidly changing climate creates the potential for more listings and adds to the urgency of recovery actions. Climate change not only has direct effects on at-risk species and ecosystems, it also exacerbates the impacts of other stressors, such as invasive species, limited water supplies, habitat loss, and environmental contaminants.

As climate change expands the scope and complexity of the problems we face with listed and candidate species, landscape conservation offers the conservation community a way to identify, prioritize, and improve species recovery efforts. Landscape Conservation Cooperatives—conservation-science partnerships established within geographically defined areas to support conservation planning and design, research, and monitoring programs—will serve as an invaluable new tool to help us meet the challenge of climate change while helping us address the needs of imperiled species.

Measuring Our Progress

In carrying out our mission, we will track our accomplishments and measure our progress through a representative group of “spotlight species” that have detailed conservation action plans. The plans, which are currently available at www.fws.gov/endangered, lay out discrete, measurable conservation goals and actions for which we will hold ourselves accountable. We will continue to undertake the key actions necessary to recover all listed and candidate species, but with more than 1,300 species on the list of threatened and endangered species, focusing on spotlight species will allow us to measure our progress more clearly and effectively.

Our Guiding Principles

To better fulfill the purposes of the ESA and achieve our conservation goals, we will integrate the following principles into our implementation of the Act:

Focus on Recovery—Strategically integrate recovery planning into all aspects of ESA implementation, including actions to preclude listings, interagency consultations, and landowner incentives to conserve imperiled species. Streamline and improve the effectiveness of current recovery programs and tools. Keep recovery plans relevant and adaptive to more readily support conservation actions.

Provide Conservation Incentives—Create incentives that encourage the conservation of listed and candidate species and make it easier to complete actions needed to eliminate threats and provide benefits to species.

Increase Public Participation—Seek all available opportunities to increase participation from our partners and the public in conserving species. Engage our partners and the public throughout the decision-making process to ensure that other's ideas and concerns are understood and considered, and provide feedback on how their input influenced our conservation decisions.

Ensure Clear and Consistent Policies and Implementation—Improve the effectiveness of the ESA to recover imperiled species by working within our organization and with our partners and the public to improve the consistency and clarity of our policies, and our processes for their implementation.

Make Decisions Based on Sound Science—Ensure that actions taken to conserve listed species are based on the best available science and openly share the scientific bases of our decisions.

Resolve Conflicts—Find ways to reduce the frequency and intensity of conflicts and employ our best efforts to resolve conflicts as early as possible.

We Can't Save Endangered Species Alone.

We need your help

Conservation and recovery of imperiled species is a mission of hope that belongs to all of us. The Endangered Species Program exercises its leadership role in this mission with an enthusiasm borne of a deep commitment to sustaining our Nation's natural resource heritage and its biodiversity. We are joined in our efforts by citizens of all ages and backgrounds from across the country, individuals whose environmental stewardship is helping to ensure that America's most vulnerable species and habitats have a fighting chance. Private landowners, students, developers, biologists, corporate representatives, volunteers, business owners, artists, and members of the U.S. military are among those whose conservation actions, large and small, are making a difference. We invite you to join us in this mission, too.

Visit us at www.fws.gov/Endangered to learn more about what the Endangered Species Program is doing in partnership with others to conserve threatened and endangered species. Securing the long-term future of our Nation's fish, wildlife and plant resources and the habitats that sustain them is a responsibility we all share. Working together, we can use the ESA to help create a lasting legacy of healthy, thriving ecosystems for generations of Americans to come.

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