UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT REQUESTS LEGISLATION TO PROTECT ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILDLIFE

The Department of the Interior said today it has submitted to Congress proposed legislation designed to protect rare and endangered native species of fish and wildlife.

Main objective of the proposal is to authorize and direct the Secretary of the Interior to protect, restore and, where necessary, establish or re-establish wild populations of selected species threatened with extinction.

The Department said a secondary objective of the bill is to consolidate and, in some cases, expand the authority of the Secretary of the Interior regarding the National Wildlife Refuge System, and other areas acquired or reserved for endangered species.

In a letter to Congress, the Department said that some 24 birds and 12 mammals native to the United States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have become extinct since settlement of the 50 States. Examples given included the passenger pigeon, heath hen, Carolina parakeet, spotted Hawaiian rail, eastern elk, Texas and California grizzly bears, and the badlands bighorn sheep. The Department said these animals are gone forever and will be joined before long by some 35 kinds of mammals and 30 to 40 kinds of birds unless special conservation work is undertaken.

Special efforts have been made and are continuing to be made by the Department and other Federal agencies, conservation organizations, and some State fish and game departments to save such threatened species or subspecies as the whooping crane, Attwater's prairie chicken, California condor, and Key deer, the Department said. Similar protection is needed, the Department added, for other threatened species to insure against disturbance, depletion of food and habitat, and other adverse factors.

The Department said the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 expressly makes the Fund available for obtaining land for the preservation of threatened species of fish and wildlife, when the land acquisition is otherwise authorized by law, and that the Department's policy will be to finance land acquisitions for the endangered species program from this Fund wherever possible.

Assisted by private conservation organizations and State conservation agencies, the Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife is preparing a list of rare and endangered species. The Bureau also is responsible for recommending measures to be taken to protect the various species.

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