



Protecting Our Environment

Endangered Species Act May Need Updating

by *James L. Cummins*

(NAPSA)—Since the Endangered Species Act was signed by Richard Nixon in 1973, over 1,300 species have been listed as threatened or endangered, yet only 10 have recovered and been delisted. During that same period, 35 listed species have been found to be extinct. If our health system had those kinds of success rates, we would make some changes.

The well-intentioned ESA sometimes results in hostility on the part of landowners by giving government the ability to control how property is used. This can make even the most harmless of birds, plants or other listed species the landowner's foe, while actually damaging the species needing protection.

The Act does not now place emphasis on recovering populations to get them off the list. The Act should require scientific consideration of what habitat must be protected, restored and enhanced, how much is necessary, or if habitat even is a limiting factor in recovery. Lacking that, litigation has replaced careful, peer reviewed science in decision making. This takes protection and recovery out of the hands of wildlife managers and places it in those of lawyers.

We should update the ESA by providing incentives to forge solutions that both recover species and protect the private landowner. This is not a new concept. The Act could also be improved to do more to keep species from becoming endangered or threatened, like



The bald eagle, symbol of America, is a beneficiary of the Endangered Species Act.

controlling invasive species. Damage to habitat by invasive species has contributed to the decline of 42 percent of listed species.

We also need greater cooperation between state and federal agencies to protect species. Fish hatcheries and other captive breeding programs should be utilized. Small tweaks in the Army Corps of Engineers' maintenance programs have allowed it to greatly benefit species along the Mississippi River. Similar opportunities exist with other agencies in other ecosystems.

Our current 1 percent success rate in recovering species is not good enough. We can do better. Congress should update and modernize the Endangered Species Act.

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