

WORD FROM WASHINGTON



Congress To Protect Endangered Species

by *Tim Wigley*

(NAPSA)—“The Endangered Species Act (ESA) desperately needs an update and renewed focus on species recovery,” said Richard Pombo (R-CA), chairman of the House Resources Committee. “Its one-percent recovery result over the last 30 years has failed to live up to the Act’s noble intent and our intrinsic value as Americans.”

Pombo, who has joined Senators Chafee (R-RI) and Crapo (R-ID), as well as Representative Walden (R-OR) to work on improvements to ESA, was referring to the fact that only 10 of over 1,300 species listed as threatened or endangered since the Act was passed in 1973 have recovered sufficiently to be taken off the lists.

Both Democrats and Republicans who support the goal of recovering threatened and endangered species increasingly see the need to update and strengthen the Act to make it more effective.

Proposed changes include requiring scientific reviews of species before listing as endangered or threatened; scientific review of critical habitat designations; requiring state participation in planning and decision-making; and making formation of recovery plans mandatory at the time a species is listed. Incentives for voluntary conservation and recovery programs by private property owners are also important.

The recovery of the peregrine falcon, which some have hailed as an example of the ESA’s success, was actually accomplished by private captive breeding programs and restrictions on the use of the pesticide DDT.



Similarly, the bald eagle, which may soon come off the endangered list as fully recovered, grew its numbers, not because of the ESA but because of restrictions on hunting and the use of DDT.

Much of the ESA’s lack of success can be because no recovery plan is required when a species is listed, though set-aside of critical habitat is required, often before it can be scientifically determined what habitat should be protected.

Some say habitat protection should remain the single tool in the Act for recovering species. Habitat protection, however, proved to be irrelevant in the case of the falcon. The adaptable birds now thrive in the nation’s largest cities, nesting on tall buildings instead of mountains while feeding on the large pigeon populations common to metropolitan areas.

Even bald eagles, thought to shun humans, became comfortable residents in many of Florida’s residential areas when their customary habitat was ravaged by hurricanes.

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