

## **Urge Your Senators Not to Weaken the Endangered Species Act**

[February 10, 2006] The Senate may consider the reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) following House passage of HR 3824, the Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act (TESRA) introduced by Chairman Pombo (R-CA) of the House Resources Committee.

### **Background**

HR 3824, Rep. Pombo's controversial rewrite, passed the House on September 29, just 10 days after its introduction. It would make it more difficult to move wildlife along the road to recovery. It requires owners with species on their land to be paid to protect endangered species, forcing wildlife agencies to choose between enforcing the ESA's prohibition against harming or killing endangered species, or writing large checks to developers to obey the law. HR 3824 repeals the ESA's critical habitat provision, without replacing it with adequate and enforceable habitat protection.

Senator Chafee (R-RI) of the Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water Subcommittee of the Environment and Public Works Committee held hearings in 2005 and has called for a Keystone Center (<http://keystone.org>) dialogue among various stakeholders to provide recommendations for implementing critical habitat. A final report is expected in late February. Senators Chafee, Clinton (D-NY), Inhofe (R-OK), Jeffords (I-VT), Crapo (R-ID), and Lincoln (D-AR) asked Keystone to answer three questions:

1. As currently written and implemented, is the ESA adequately protecting and conserving the habitat listed species need to recover?
2. If not, how can the ESA be improved to better conserve habitat and help species recover?
3. What specific changes and recommendations can the regulated and NGO communities jointly recommend, advocate for, and help implement?

Senators hope the Keystone recommendations will inform their upcoming hearings on the ESA.

In December, Sen. Crapo introduced an ESA bill, S 2110, in the Senate. Although the bill purports to provide greater incentives for private landowner conservation, the legislative language does not carry out the bill's stated goals. Instead, the bill would seriously weaken the ESA's safety-net provisions protecting endangered species and habitats.

### **Action:**

- Call or write your Senators and urge them to support a strong Endangered Species Act that does not weaken habitat protections for endangered species.
- Remind them that caring for all of creation is one of the charges that we have been given from God.

Call your Senators at 202-224-3121. Or write them through our network. Need help sending e-mail to your Members of Congress? Go to our e-mail message service, at <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials> , insert your Zip Code (click "Go"), then click on the button under their name to e-mail them.

### **Why Presbyterians Care about Endangered Species**

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark. Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are clean, the male and its mate; and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of the earth". They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. (Genesis 7:1-3,15)

Then God said to Noah and his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." (Genesis 9:8-10, 16)

The Endangered Species Act has been referred to as the modern Noah's Ark. Like Noah's Ark, its passage by the U.S. Congress 30 years ago was intended to preserve all living creatures whether they had particular value to humans or not. Like Noah, Congress, in passing the Endangered Species Act, was recognizing human responsibility for other creatures on this planet.

The Act has had many successes in its 30 years of existence, [most notably the great expansion of the range of the once endangered bald eagle.](#)

In 2001, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly passed a resolution, "A Call to Halt Mass Extinction." In the resolution, the Assembly issued this call, proclaiming:

The Creator-Sustainer of all life wills its continuance, diversity, beauty and interconnectedness. When human actions and inactions desecrate the natural systems ordained by God, they affront the Creator. When decisions and actions protect and restore creation's integrity, diversity, beauty, and interconnectedness, they affirm God's wisdom and glory and please the Creator.

The Creator-Deliverer calls human communities to work with God to rectify the abuses whereby human impacts upon the earth are leading to a mass extinction of living species. This mass extinction would fundamentally alter and undermine the life and well-being of the human and other creatures that survive. It would rob all future generations of the gifts of wholeness and diversity that God intends.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) calls Presbyterians, other citizens, governments, and societal institutions to face the severity of this threat and to take the steps in practice, policy, and systemic change that will prevent mass extinction and preserve the biodiversity essential to the flourishing of life.

### **ESA at Risk**

When the Endangered Species Act was first up for renewal in the 1990s, the then head of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources refused a request by Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI) that letters from Protestant (including Presbyterians!), Catholic, and Jewish religious persons supportive of the Endangered Species Act be entered into the record of the committee's hearing on the Act. The ensuing outcry helped derail an effort to weaken the Endangered Species Act. In the intervening decade, the ESA has been continued on a year-to-year basis. Now, new efforts are underway to radically change the Act, while not outright repealing it.

As [The Washington Post](#) noted in May 2005, "Congress has amended the Endangered Species Act three times since its inception, but its broad outlines remained largely intact. In 1997 Sen. John H. Chafee (R-RI) brokered a bipartisan compromise to restructure the law, but Senate GOP

leaders refused to hold a floor vote. Chafee's son Lincoln now chairs the subcommittee charged with overseeing the law and is hoping to build on his late father's legacy." (5/20/05)

### **Why Do We Need A Strong Endangered Species Act?**

Healthy species indicate a healthy environment. Plant and animal species often warn us of toxic pollution threats or subtle changes in the environment that could threaten human survival. Plants, animals and other creatures not only provide us food and medicine, but have a right to share the Earth with us. God commanded them, too, "to go forth and multiply" after leaving the Ark. We have greatly interfered with their fulfilling that commandment.

Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson warned the 1992 gathering of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment that thousands of species become extinct worldwide each year. Given this rapid decline, within 50 years one quarter of the world's species could be lost forever.

A stronger ESA could reverse this disturbing trend in species endangerment and extinction. Recovery plans must be developed and executed. And the Bush administration must give the US Fish & Wildlife Service adequate funding for the program. Egregious under funding could cause the extinction of many species. Money and staff shortages have hampered the implementation of recovery plans, while resource constraints have kept 257 species waiting as candidates for listing, meaning that the species will be officially listed when funding becomes available for their protection. The proposals in both the Pombo and Crapo bills to pay landowners to protect endangered species would divert already limited funds from the real task of protecting God's creatures and provide a windfall for those persons willing to threaten destruction of endangered species habitats.

--Jaydee Hanson