

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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### Opening Statement

#### Ranking Member Matt Cartwright (PA-17)

#### Hearing on “Barriers to Endangered Species Act Delisting, Part II”

#### Subcommittee on Health Care, Benefits and Administrative Rules

#### April 21, 2016

I thank the Chairs for holding this important hearing. I welcome the opportunity to look for ways to improve the administration of the Endangered Species Act.

The Endangered Species Act is the strongest and most important federal law protecting imperiled wildlife and plants. For 40 years, the ESA has helped prevent the extinction of our nation's wildlife treasures, including beloved American icons such as the bald eagle, the humpback whale and the green sea turtles.

My own state of Pennsylvania has 14 federally-recognized endangered or threatened species, including the Northern long-eared Bat and Northeastern Bulrush, both known to occur in my own district.

The protection and recovery of these species has demonstrated the clear merits of this nation-wide, scientific approach to protecting our wildlife. As has been mentioned, the ESA has prevented 99% of species listed as endangered or threatened from becoming extinct.

During this time, the Fish and Wildlife service has continued to improve its methodologies. Scientific advances have given us a much deeper understanding of nature, and allowed for better programs for protecting endangered species and start them on the road to recovery.

The regulatory tools at the FWS's disposal have also become more effective. Through the use of Candidate Conservation Agreements and Habitat Conservation Plans, the FWS has been able to work proactively with private groups to find a balance between economic activity and the protections needed for vulnerable species.

These programs represent a win-win, allowing for productive use and enjoyment of our lands, while allowing endangered species to recover and keeping new species from becoming endangered.

However, Candidate Conservation Agreements and Habitat Conservation Plans, like the rest of FWS' programs only work because they are based on sound science. No two agreements

or plans are alike; each has different circumstances, with different implications for various species.

There are no shortcuts in science, and the agency has to do the work in order to be able to approve these plans. This takes time, and it takes funding. When funding is cut, work backs up, and it becomes harder and harder to run highly effective, but resource intensive programs such as the CCAAs and HCPs.

Furthermore, when an Agency loses staff to budget cuts, it becomes increasingly difficult for it to function. And with these budget cuts comes missed statutory deadlines, such as those for reviewing a petition to place a species on the Endangered Species List. These missed deadlines are what lead to lawsuits from concerned citizens that have a right to see their petitions acted on in a timely manner.

I urge my colleagues to consider the benefits of better funding for the Fish and Wildlife Service. I'd also like to remind them that the fastest way to see more species removed from the Endangered Species List is by giving FWS the resources it needs to ensure the species' recovery.

I thank our Director Ashe for appearing today and I thank him for his service and the vital work he is doing to protect our nation's wildlife. Director Ashe, I look forward to hearing your testimony.

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