



July 11, 2018

The Honorable John Barrasso, MD
Chairman, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510

Re: Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities (HFHC) is a grassroots coalition that advocates for active forest management on federally-owned forests. Thus, we support efforts to modernize the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and to make its implementation and processes more responsive to the needs and perspectives of states and local communities. These goals are reflected in the proposed Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018.

HFHC operates in the Pacific Northwest, Inter-Mountain West and Great Lakes States. We advocate for communities that continue to be socially and economically impacted by ESA-related decisions that have dramatically reduced timber harvests on federal lands, and have significantly restricted opportunities for active management that keep our forests healthy, resilient and accessible. Over the past several decades, the ESA has fundamentally failed to recover vulnerable wildlife species. It is part of a complex and counterproductive web of federal policies that have cost tens of thousands of American jobs, high poverty and unemployment in rural communities, and forests and wildlife habitat that's been degraded by catastrophic wildfire, insect infestations and disease.

It's time to fix this well-intentioned yet broken law, and the Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018 is a step in the right direction. HFHC is especially supportive of provisions that give states and communities a greater role in listing decisions, recovery planning and implementation processes. It is critical for the federal government to (1) leverage the knowledge and expertise of those who live, work and recreate on affected lands, and (2) implement the ESA in a way that doesn't destroy family-wage jobs and limit efforts to reduce the risks of catastrophic events on public lands.

The committee should consider that a primary barrier to active forest management is the considerable cost and time it takes for federal agencies to satisfy environmental regulatory requirements. As you consider this legislation, we ask that you seek long-term solutions that ensure timely ESA consultations, eliminate duplicative paperwork, and help expedite urgently needed forest projects. This could be accomplished, in part, by allowing U.S. Forest Service biologists to make determinations when actions are not likely to adversely affect vulnerable species.

Thank you for bringing forth the Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018, and especially for your leadership in improving our system of federal land management.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nick Smith".

Nick Smith
Executive Director
Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities

Restore our federal forests to restore our rural communities
HealthyForests.Org