



## **LITTLE SNAKE RIVER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

P.O. BOX 355 – Baggs, WY 82321 ph# 307-383-7860

July 6, 2018

The Honorable John Barrasso  
Chairman, Environment and Public Works Committee  
United States Senate  
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

The Little Snake River Conservation District stands in strong support of the proposed “Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018.” This discussion draft bill would amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) to increase transparency, increased regulatory certainty, and facilitate the collaborative efforts from other important stake holders from state and local governments. For too long those state and local governments with strong ties to the land and significant levels of expertise in land and habitat management and demonstrated ability to work in cross jurisdictional land ownership patterns have not been afforded the opportunity to participate in the development of conservation activities and restoration of both ESA species and their habitat. We appreciate the leadership of Chairman Barrasso and members of the committee on the issue of ESA reform, and strongly supports this very important legislation.

The Little Snake River Conservation District is one of the 32 conservation districts in Wyoming and one of 3000 in the nation. We are the front line for the conservation of the nation soil, water and natural resource. The Conservation Districts are the original grass roots, locally lead, mechanism to get conservation on the ground. Specifically, the Little Snake River Conservation District has lead numerous cross jurisdictional landscape scale effort in the restoration and conservation of our water resource, habitat, and watershed. With our long history of implementing successful conservation efforts we would welcome the opportunity to bring that expertise to the table to further the original intent of the Endanger Species Act.

The original intent of the ESA - stated in the Act itself - was to encourage “the States and other interested parties, through Federal financial assistance and a system of incentives, to develop and maintain conservation programs which meet national and international standards”. The authors of the ESA clearly believed in applying it in a way that would foster collaboration and efficiency of program delivery, in an incentive-driven manner. Unfortunately, implementation of the ESA has “progressed” in recent years towards an approach that is now driven by litigation and sometimes inappropriate interpretation by federal agencies. Rural communities in areas represented by our organization have, in particular, suffered as a result.

We are pleased to see the Committee re-assess the original intent of the ESA, which emphasized a paradigm where species conservation could be achieved in cooperation with state and local interests, including farmers and ranchers, instead of at the expense of agriculture, which is happening in several Western states under current interpretation of the Act.



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Wyoming Governor Matt Mead, as Chairman of the Western Governors' Association (WGA), launched the Species Conservation and Endangered Species Act Initiative (Initiative) in June 2015. Since then, the entire process has been transparent and constructive. A series of Initiative workshops and webinars, along with a series of questionnaires, have enabled states to share best practices in species management, promote the role of states in species conservation, and explore options for improving the efficacy of the ESA. Workshops and webinars were designed to foster an inclusive and bipartisan dialogue on how to improve implementation of the ESA and better incentivize species conservation efforts to avoid the need to list a species in the first place.

Each of these ideas and others are reflected in the proposed bill. We strongly support the improved state-federal consultation provision relating to conservation and recovery of wildlife included in the draft. The bill also encourages conservation activities through regulatory certainty. Title II also contains important provisions that will improve application of conservation agreements, candidate conservation agreements with assurances, and safe harbor agreements.

Finally, the proposed bill also includes practical improvements to the ESA that will strengthen conservation decision-making through increased transparency, optimize conservation through resource prioritization, and authorize studies that will improve transparency of management decisions and ultimately, improve conservation. For all of these reasons, the Little Snake River Conservation District strongly supports the draft "Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018" and look forward to working with you further to advance this important legislation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 307-383-7860 if you have further questions.

Sincerely,  
Larry Hicks, Natural Resource Coordinator