Our Endangered Species Program and How It Works With Landowners

The Endangered Species Program conserves endangered and threatened species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. As of September 2001, there were 1,244 U.S. species listed as endangered or threatened, 237 candidate species and 38 species proposed for listing. Conserving endangered and threatened species is necessary to preserve our natural heritage for future generations and to maintain our quality of life. Conserving ecosystems benefits all users of ecosystem resources and is essential to maintaining our nation’s long term economic prosperity.

Our Program’s priorities are:
1) Preventing extinction.
2) Recovering species that are listed.
3) Making listing species unnecessary.
4) Providing quality customer service.

Endangered Species Program Elements
■ Through the Candidate Conservation program, the Service, in partnership with public agencies, private organizations, and landowners, works to reduce the threats to declining species, and thus avoid listing. By acting early before a species becomes imperiled, the Service can reduce the costs of recovery and maintain land use flexibility for landowners.

■ Through the Listing program, the Service follows Federal rulemaking procedures and specific ESA requirements to determine whether to list a species. A formal peer review process and an opportunity for public comment ensure that the Service obtains the best available scientific information to support its decisions.

Endangered species are defined by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as those species that are in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range. Threatened species are those species that are likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

When necessary, essential species habitat is protected through a critical habitat designation at the time of or soon after listing. Once listed, the species is afforded the full range of protections available under the ESA. These protections include prohibitions on killing, harming or otherwise taking a species as well as restrictions on import/export to prevent trade-related declines.

■ Through the Consultation program, the Service works with private landowners and other non-Federal entities to develop Habitat Conservation Plans that authorize the incidental take of listed species. The HCP process allows private economic development to proceed while promoting listed species conservation. Also through this program, the Service works with other Federal agencies to ensure that their activities and the activities they authorize are compatible with species needs.

■ Through the Recovery program, the Service develops partnerships with Federal, State, and local agencies, tribes, researchers, conservation organizations, businesses, landowners, and individuals to conserve listed species. Recovery efforts include a wide range of management actions, such as controlled propagation and habitat protection and restoration, that reduce threats or other wise benefit populations so they will stabilize and ultimately increase. A species is considered for delisting once it recovers to the point where it no longer needs the ESA’s special protections.

Assistance to Landowners
According to a 1993 study by the Association for Biodiversity Information and The Nature Conservancy, half of listed species have at least 80% of their habitat on private lands. Because of listed species' dependence on private lands, private landowner participation in endangered species conservation is critical to successful species recovery. Several programs provide mechanisms for increased cooperation with private landowners, tribes, State and local governments, industry, and agricultural interests:

■ The Safe Harbor Policy encourages voluntary management for listed species to promote recovery on non-Federal lands by giving assurances to the landowners that no additional future regulatory restrictions will be imposed.

■ The Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances Policy provides incentives for non-Federal property owners to conserve candidate species, thus potentially making listing unnecessary.

■ Habitat Conservation Planning allows private landowners to develop land supporting listed species provided they undertake conservation measures. The No Surprises Policy assures participating landowners that they will incur no additional mitigation requirements beyond those they agreed to in their Habitat Conservation Plans, even if circumstances change.
Incentive and Grants Programs

The Private Stewardship Program provides grants and other assistance on a competitive basis to individuals and groups engaged in local, private, and voluntary conservation efforts that benefit federally listed, proposed, or candidate species, or other at-risk species. A diverse panel of representatives from State and Federal government, conservation organizations, agriculture and development interests, and the science community will assess applications and make recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior, who will award the grants.

The Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (section 6 of the ESA) provides funding to States and Territories to participate in a wide array of conservation projects for candidate, proposed and listed species. For FY 2002, funding will be available to implement conservation projects for listed and species at risk (Conservation Grants); integrating habitat conservation into local land use planning through development of Habitat Conservation Plans (Habitat Conservation Planning Assistance Grants); furthering species conservation through acquisition of land and easements associated with approved Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP Land Acquisition Grants); and acquiring lands essential to the recovery of listed species (Recovery Land Acquisition Grants).

Looking Ahead

By building strong partnerships and initiating early and collaborative conservation efforts, the Service can best achieve the purpose of the Endangered Species Act to conserve endangered and threatened species and the ecosystems upon which they depend.

Contact Us

Want more information on a particular endangered species or to enter into a partnership with us? Please contact the Regional Office which handles the State(s) in which you are interested. If they cannot help you, they will gladly direct you to the nearest local Service office or in the direction you need.

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