

Endangered Species Act Myths and Facts

There are many misconceptions about the Endangered Species Act. Here are a few common myths, followed by the truth.



Success or Failure?

MYTH: The Endangered Species Act is a failure because it has led to the recovery of only a handful of species.

REALITY: The Endangered Species Act has been nearly 100 percent successful in saving species from extinction.

* According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 99 percent of the species ever listed under the Endangered Species Act remain on the planet today.

* A study published in the Annual Review of Ecological Systematics identified 172 species that may have become extinct during the period from 1973 to 1998 if Endangered Species Act protections had not been implemented.

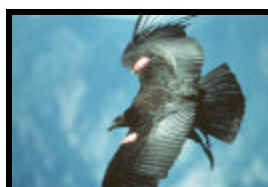
* According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, of the listed species whose conditions are known, 68 percent are stable or improving. The longer a species enjoys the Endangered Species Act's protections, the more likely it is that its condition will stabilize or improve.

It is unrealistic to measure success based solely on the number of species delisted. Full recovery, particularly given the shortfall in funding allocated for this purpose, is understandably a long-term process. The bald eagle, the black-footed ferret, the American alligator, the whooping crane, and the California condor are just a few of the many examples of species that have benefited greatly from Endangered Species Act protections.

Job Killer?

MYTH: The Endangered Species Act puts plants and animals above people, costing us money and jobs.

REALITY: The Endangered Species Act explicitly requires balancing species protection and people's economic needs. Once a species is listed, the Endangered Species Act requires that people and the economy be considered at every stage -- including the designation of habitat, the development of regulation, and the creation of alternatives. Plus, the Endangered Species Act actually helps the economy by protecting the ecosystems that provide food, medicine, flood protection and recreation. Hunting, fishing and wildlife watching employ nearly as many people -- 2.6 million -- as the United States computer industry.





Private Property

MYTH: The Endangered Species Act gives the federal government the power to snatch away people's private property.

REALITY: Except in one unusual case involving water rights, no federal court has ever found that the Endangered Species Act has led to an unconstitutional land grab. The Endangered Species Act provides for a careful balance of private property rights, the public's right to a healthy environment, and protection of public wildlife resources.

Junk Science?

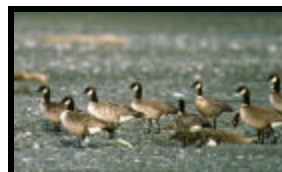
MYTH: The process of listing species under the Endangered Species Act is based on faulty and incomplete science, which leads to the listing of species not needing protection.

REALITY: Studies reveal that most species are not listed until their numbers are perilously low. A 1995 *Science* magazine article reported that the median number of surviving individuals at the time of listing is 1,000 for animals and just 100 for plants. The Endangered Species Act already requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to use the most rigorous science available in deciding whether to provide Endangered Species Act protections. According to a 2003 GAO Report to Congress, the USFWS's policies and practices have ensured that listing decisions are based on the best available science and have the support of peer reviewers and other scientific experts. Developers and other special interests often try to delay Endangered Species Act protections so that they can continue with business as usual. Protecting species before they reach the very brink of extinction is a more effective and less expensive conservation strategy.

Chokehold on Development?

MYTH: The Endangered Species Act brings construction and development to a halt.

REALITY: Of more than 219,000 development projects reviewed under the Endangered Species Act between 1998 and 2001, less than one percent were found to potentially jeopardize listed species -- and most of these were allowed to continue after including reasonable alternatives to minimize environmental harm.



Too Expensive?

MYTH: Protecting endangered species is an expensive luxury we can't afford.

REALITY: Extinction is something we can't afford. Diverse plants, wildlife and fish provide us with priceless benefits -- from supplying lifesaving drugs to maintaining natural ecosystems and recreational lands. In 2005, Congress gave the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service a mere \$143 million to implement the Endangered Species Act -- the same price as approximately 18 miles of a four-lane federal highway. This represents an average cost of merely 48 cents per American per year.



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