

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074  
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

### Opening Statement

#### Ranking Member Brenda Lawrence (MI-14)

#### Hearing on "Barriers to Endangered Species Act Delisting, Part I"

#### Subcommittee on the Interior

#### April 20, 2016

Madam Chairwoman, thank you for holding this important hearing.

America's species face challenges on many fronts, including real estate development, energy exploration and global climate change.

In my own state of Michigan, there are roughly 25 federally recognized endangered or threatened species, including the Karner Blue Butterfly and the Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid, both found in or around Detroit.

But I am optimistic that all of these species can be saved. That's because the nation's principal statute, the Endangered Species Act, has a remarkable track record. Ninety-nine percent of the species that have qualified for its protections are still with us today.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 was a bipartisan legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by President Nixon. The ESA's purpose is to conserve species identified as endangered or threatened with extinction, and conserving the ecosystems on which they depend.

Some want to roll back those protections. They point to a low rate of delistings to indicate the failure this important legislation. They complain that there is too much litigation. They support bills to sidestep the scientifically-informed regulatory process.

I think that is an unfortunate point of view and ignores reality. The reason species are listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act is the inability or unwillingness of state wildlife agencies to protect them from extinction.

I am not saying that there cannot be differences of opinion about the status of a given species. Fortunately, the federal law requires that those opinions be informed by science, and not guided by political rhetoric or self-interest.

Under this administration, the Fish and Wildlife Service has delisted 18 species, 16 due to recovery – more than in any single administration since ESA was enacted in 1973.

So in conclusion, we should be celebrating the Endangered Species Act, not detracting from it. And that means funding the Fish and Wildlife Service so it can use all the tools Congress gave to it, including voluntary Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances, and habitat conservation plans, in addition to formal listings.

Inadequate funding has meant long lines and excessive delays in the agency's consideration of these various measures at protecting endangered or threatened species. That is a shame, but one that was created by Congress.

I thank our witnesses for appearing today and I look forward to their testimony.

---

Contact: Jennifer Werner, Communications Director, (202) 225-5051.