

## **Rep. Jared Huffman Opening Statement**

### **State of Wildlife Hearing**

**895 words, ~5 min**

Welcome to the Water, Oceans, and Wildlife subcommittee 101 hearing on the state of wildlife. So far, we've talked about the state of our water supplies, the state of our oceans, and now it's time to talk about wildlife.

Our topic today is especially fitting because it is National Wildlife Week. This week celebrates the anniversaries of several important events in the preservation of our nation's wildlife, including the establishment of the first National Wildlife Refuge, Pelican Island, in 1903; the Duck Stamp Act of 1934; and the founding of the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 1940.

For over a century, Americans have expected that their representatives work together to protect wildlife. And that's because our experiences with nature and wildlife are fundamental to our cultures, our families, and our way of life.

Maybe you go hunting or fishing with your family, maybe your kids watch the birdfeeder in the backyard, or maybe you've

visited our national parks and wildlife refuges and seen all the wild beauty that our country has to offer. I, for one, get out as much as possible in my district to fish. There are few things better than a relaxing day spent fishing at a quiet spot on the North Coast of California.

I think it's safe to say that we all want to protect native wildlife, both for the sake of wildlife itself and for us and future generations to enjoy. In fact, 4 out of 5 Americans support the Endangered Species Act and protecting species. We also share the goal of helping endangered wildlife around the globe, whether it is elephants, rhinos, tigers, polar bears, whales, or pandas.

Although we come from different states, with different landscapes and regional issues, the goal of today's hearing is to get a clear and fact-based overview of the state of wildlife. Unfortunately, what I know so far, and what our expert witnesses will likely tell you, is that the state of many species in this country and across the globe is dire.

In the history of the planet, there have been 5 major extinctions of life on Earth, including the time a meteor wiped out the

dinosaurs. While you may not see a meteor falling from outer space or volcanoes filling the skies with ash right now, scientists have determined that we are in the middle of a sixth mass extinction.

And the truth is, it's because of us. Human activity has destroyed all kinds of habitat, polluted our water and air, and is changing the climate in ways that many species of wildlife are struggling to keep up with. If we don't do something about climate change, scientists predict that 1 in 6 species could face extinction.

However, it's completely in our ability to solve these problems. There are several legislative proposals to protect wildlife that have been put forward by members of this Congress. We plan to hold legislative hearings soon to get many of these bills moving.

We will also be conducting oversight of this administration, which we've seen place industry interests above those of the American people over and over again, including protecting wildlife and outdoor recreation.

Just last week, we held a hearing on the many threats facing one of the most endangered whales alive today, the North Atlantic

right whale. Catering to oil and gas companies, the Trump administration has decided to increase the stressors facing this already imperiled species, even in the face of opposition from local communities and states.

The Endangered Species Act is another top target for the Trump administration. The administration is currently finalizing rules that would create loopholes in the law, putting more species at risk of extinction and giving more leeway to industry. We expect the administration to release the final rules any day now.

The Trump administration is also undermining protections for wildlife in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, one of the last remaining pristine habitats on Earth, by opening it up to oil and gas drilling. Over 700 species of plants and animals call the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge home, including polar bears, wolves, and the Porcupine caribou herd, which the Gwich'in people have relied on for time immemorial. I introduced the Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act to restore protections for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and urge my colleagues to join over one hundred other Members of Congress in supporting the bill.

The Trump administration announced last year that “incidental take” under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act would no longer be interpreted as prohibiting the incidental killing of birds. And guess who benefits? You guessed it: oil and gas companies.

Finally, the quality of key habitats that promote recreation, hunting, and fishing, as well as access to these habitats, are being eroded by the administration’s energy-dominance policy.

As you can see, there is a clear pattern here. And unfortunately, the list goes far beyond these few instances I’ve described today.

So this Congress, this committee has a lot of work to do - making sure we hold this administration accountable for decisions that further threaten wildlife and putting new, innovative ideas forward to address the sixth mass extinction.

We’re going to hear from a great panel of wildlife experts today.

Thank you all for being here. I now invite the Ranking Member for his remarks, and then we will welcome and introduce our witnesses.