

Response to Member Question  
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Oversight Hearing before the Committee on Natural Resources,  
Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Subcommittee

U.S. House of Representatives  
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This responds to a written question from Rep. Stansbury based on my testimony before the Subcommittee on February 26, 2025.

More than a half century after a Republican president signed the Endangered Species Act into law, members of Congress should not only affirm the nation's commitment to recovering threatened and endangered species and the ecosystems upon which those species depend, lawmakers should strengthen species and ecosystem protection efforts by increasing funding for conservation measures and the agencies that carry them out.

Our country does indeed face an unprecedented time in many ways. The current occupant of the White House vows to make the country great, but at the same time issues orders that call for putting people "over" other species and denigrating those who care about protecting creatures from extinction as "radical environmentalists." Yet all around us there are warning signs that both people *and* the natural world are increasingly in harm's way. Unprecedented floods, fires, and storms fueled by climate change have ended or uprooted the lives of many Americans and caused billions upon billions of dollars in damage. At the same time, the country faces a related biodiversity crisis – a 2023 NatureServe report found that a third of our plants, 40% of animals in the United States, and over 40% of our ecosystems are facing range-wide collapse. This trend will not lead to greatness. On the contrary, it will continue to impose enormous costs on our society – both in terms of lives and dollars, as well as in aesthetic and moral terms. On the other hand, restoring species and ecosystem function creates natural capital and increases economic well-being.

Restoration of the Klamath River ecosystem provides an excellent example of the promise – and unfinished business – of the Endangered Species Act. Led by tribes in the region who have stewarded and relied on the river's resources for thousands of years – along with ESA protections for both Klamath salmon and native fish that live in headwaters lakes – removal of four dams that had outlasted their useful lives was completed last summer. Thousands of salmon are already colonizing the renewed habitat, exceeding scientists' greatest expectations and heralding the beginning of a return of abundant tribal and commercial fisheries that have been only a memory. Early rafting expeditions have both cataloged the return of eagles, herons, and

other wildlife and signaled the start of renewed recreational opportunities on the river. In December, work began in the upper Klamath Basin to restore wetlands that not only provided habitat for untold numbers of juvenile salmon and migratory birds, but helped store water in increasingly hot summers and replenish groundwater that increasingly serves as the only water available to the area's decreasing number of farmers. However, the Trump Administration recently cut off funding allocated under the bipartisan infrastructure bill passed by Congress in 2021 that was enabling the next crucial steps in restoring a functional Klamath ecosystem and improving conditions for both the basin's wildlife and the people who live there.

As in the Klamath, across the country the Endangered Species Act is a catalyst for actions that benefit species facing extinction as well as the human communities that ultimately rely on a healthy environment. However, senseless attacks on the ESA, funding to implement recovery and restoration measures, and the agencies responsible for the law's implementation by the Trump Administration and Republicans in Congress threaten to derail this progress.

True leaders recognize the wisdom of pioneering ecologist Aldo Leopold, who called for people to recognize that humans are simply members of the Earth's biotic community – our fate is tied to the fate of all life on the planet. Thus, protecting and strengthening the Endangered Species Act ultimately benefits us.