

March 24, 2025

The Honorable Chair Bruce Westerman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Westerman,

On behalf of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), I am writing to express strong support for H.R. 1897, the ESA Amendments Act of 2025.

NRECA is the national trade association representing nearly 900 not-for-profit electric cooperatives that serve 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation's landscape. The nature of electric co-ops' service territories and their local, member-driven structure empowers them to play a vital role in transforming communities, innovating to meet tomorrow's energy demands, and being good stewards of the land and water on which they operate. As such, electric co-ops have a vested interest in protecting the environment in the communities that they serve.

Co-ops operate across more public lands and critical habitat areas than any other type of electric utility. Our members regularly collaborate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to steward endangered and threatened species located in and around our rights-of-way and operations while ensuring the reliability and affordability of the electric system. Our members understand how the Endangered Species Act (ESA) helps ensure that at-risk species can thrive for generations to come. However, the ESA in its current form has become a source of regulatory uncertainty, which hampers conservation efforts and complicates decision-making.

The ESA Amendments Act of 2025 takes significant steps to modernize endangered species protection by improving certainty, transparency, and accountability in the ESA regulatory process. Arduous and time-consuming consultation processes and nearly constant changes in implementation of the ESA in the last two decades have introduced significant challenges and increased costs for co-ops—costs that ultimately burden consumer-members across rural America in the form of increased electricity rates. Ensuring compliance with virtually unlimited and unpredictable critical habitat designations and processes across service territories increases operations costs, jeopardizes insurance and bonding availability, and impacts investment in new and renewable sources of energy and grid expansion to accommodate the increasing electrification of our lives.

NRECA supported the ESA revisions in 2019, which provided greater clarity, efficiency, and predictability. The ESA Amendments Act of 2025 builds on these positive changes by further improving regulatory certainty and promoting a science-based, reasonable approach to species protection and recovery. This bill aligns with the original intent of the ESA by focusing on effective conservation while

reducing threats of weaponized litigation and striking a balance between species protection and community needs. These changes will help ensure that electric co-ops can continue to meet their service commitments without jeopardizing the financial stability of their operations or increasing costs for consumers.

We appreciate your support for policies that enable electric co-ops to protect natural resources while providing affordable, reliable power. We urge Congress to pass this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Matheson", with a stylized, flowing script.

Jim Matheson
CEO, NRECA