

July 18, 2025

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife,
and Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Val Hoyle
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife,
and Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle,

On behalf of our organizations and our combined millions of members and supporters, we write to express our strong opposition to H.R. 180, the “Endangered Species Transparency and Reasonableness Act,” and H.R. 4033, the “Sturgeon Conservation and Sustainability Act.” These damaging bills, which threaten the continued success of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), will be the subject of a House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries hearing on July 22, 2025. We request this letter be included in the hearing record.

The ESA is America’s most effective law to prevent the extinction and ensure the recovery of our most vulnerable animals and plants. To date, 99% of species listed under the ESA have been saved from disappearing forever, and hundreds are on the road to recovery. Thanks to the ESA, iconic American species like the bald eagle, humpback whale, and peregrine falcon are still with us today. The ESA is also immensely popular; according to a study published last month, about 84% of Americans across the political spectrum support the ESA, and this level of support has held steady for over 30 years¹. The ESA represents a promise to conserve wildlife for future generations, and the American public supports the ESA because the law has thus far made good on this promise.

H.R. 180 and H.R. 4033, which will be considered by the Subcommittee on July 22, would damage the ESA’s ability to effectively conserve imperiled species. At a time when we should be redoubling our commitment to protect imperiled wildlife and plants and stop extinction, these bills would instead favor industry interests and erode several of the ESA’s important protections, setting a precedent of using politics, rather than science, for conservation decision-making. The passage of these bills would result in significant harm to at-risk species and their habitats, further exacerbating the environmental challenges we face today.

¹ <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.13111>

H.R. 180, sponsored by Rep. Tom McClintock, would subvert the ESA's bedrock requirement that listing decisions be based on sound science by simply declaring that all information submitted by state, tribal or county governments must be considered as the best scientific and commercial data available, irrespective of its actual merit. The ESA already encourages governments to submit information that may aid the Services in making listing decisions. That information is assessed, like any other, for its accuracy and reliability. Under this provision, information of any quality provided by state, tribal, and county governments – even data that are flatly wrong – would be presumed equivalent, if not superior, to peer-reviewed research from leading species experts and other data that the Services have evaluated for its usefulness and appropriateness.

H.R. 180 also would establish burdensome and redundant procedural requirements for listing species, requiring the Secretary to publish on the internet and provide to the states all data that are the basis for each proposed listing under the ESA. The FWS and NMFS already maintain species-specific pages, must fully describe the basis for any listing in proposed and final rules published in the Federal Register, and give notice of proposed listing regulations to affected states and counties.

Moreover, the bill would attempt to discourage or intimidate the public from challenging agency actions by requiring a broad range of federal agencies to report annual expenditures on ESA-related litigation, including whether any plaintiffs received federal funding, and limiting attorneys' fees for persons suing under the Act by substituting the reduced fees available under the Equal Access to Justice Act for the Act's longstanding authorization of market-based fees for prevailing parties.

H.R. 4033, sponsored by Rep. Randy Fine, would amend section 9 of the ESA to remove any protections for sturgeon and their progeny that are held in captivity or in a controlled environment, for example in aquaculture facilities. Most sturgeon species are imperiled due to overharvesting and habitat modification, including the construction of dams that can block migration to spawning grounds.

The ESA does not preclude responsible sturgeon aquaculture and the Services have mechanisms to protect wild populations while allowing captive breeding. For example, the FWS allows aquaculture of the threatened but commercially valuable beluga sturgeon and its caviar in the United States through a liberal 4(d) rule. Sturgeon hatcheries for listed species such as the pallid sturgeon and the Gulf sturgeon are critically important to recovery of those species. This unnecessary bill would remove the Services' ability to make necessary, science-based decisions as to what protections certain captive sturgeon populations might need.

We strongly urge you to oppose H.R. 180, and H.R. 4033. These damaging bills would dramatically weaken the ESA and make it harder to protect native species and our precious natural heritage.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

American Bird Conservancy
Animal Welfare Institute
Aquarium of Niagara
Attorneys for Animals
Black Hills Preservation Project
Born Free USA
CalWild
Carnivore Coexistence Lab
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity
Christian Council of Delmarva
Climate Justice Alliance
Conservation Law Foundation
Conservation Northwest
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice Action
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Integrity Project
Environmental Protection Information Center- EPIC
FOUR PAWS USA
Friends of Blackwater, Inc.
Friends of Merrymeeting Bay
Friends of the Earth
Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project
Great Lakes Wildlife Alliance
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Guardians of the Wolves
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Izaak Walton League of America
Juniata Valley Audubon Society

Kettle Range Conservation Group
Klamath Forest Alliance
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Large Carnivore Fund
League of Conservation Voters
Los Angeles Audubon Society
Maine Audubon
National Wolfwatcher Coalition
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness
NYC Plover Project
Ocean Defense Initiative
Oceana
Orleans Audubon Society
Plan B to Save Wolves
Prairie Hills Audubon Society [of Western S.D.)
Project Coyote
Resource Renewal Institute
RESTORE: The North Woods
Rockbridge Conservation
Rocky Mountain Wild
Save Animals Facing Extinction
Save Lake Superior Association
Save Our Allegheny Ridges
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition
Save the Manatee Club
Sawtooth Science Institute
Sea Turtle Conservancy
Sierra Club
Society for the Protection of Insects
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Species Unite
The 06 Legacy
The Cougar Fund
The Rachel Carson Council
The Urban Wildlands Group
Trap Free Montana
Turtle Island Restoration Network

Watauga Riverkeeper
Western Watersheds Project
Whale and Dolphin Conservation
WildEarth Guardians
Wildlife for All
Wolf Hollow
Wolves of the Rockies
Wyoming Untrapped
Wyoming Wildlife Advocates
Yaak Valley Forest Council