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The Fossil Fuel Energy Industry vs. The Endangered Species Act

By: Cody Willnerd

It was several weeks ago that the Congressional Republicans made a push to reform the landmark Endangered Species Act to make it more friendly to landowners and fossil fuel industries. They would do this by releasing species earlier on the ESA list than before and instead focus on species that are in the greatest of need of attention. The reform would also have agencies focus on the economic costs to deny listings of species, require the agency to listen towards states concerns, and limit payouts for attorney fees in ESA litigations. This would be incredibly damaging to many species that rely on this program to stay away from extinction. This reform is also a veiled attempt for the fossil fuel energy industry to take up land that was once occupied by protected species, to be used for drilling.

The only proof you need is to follow the donors to the law makers. Take Representative Rob Bishop, The Natural Resources Committee Chairman, who has been a stark critique of the ESA for years. According to The Center for Responsive Politics, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research group, Rob Bishop has received \$432,966 from oil and gas companies. If this isn't a clear sign of oil companies buying out our politicians to work in their favor, I don't know what is. A repeal of the ESA would strongly benefit these corporate giants in the fossil fuel industry. Many lands are currently protected from mining and drilling, which stops oil and coal sources from being exploited.

How many species are currently on the list and does this act actually work? According to the National Wildlife Federation, there are 286 species that are on the candidate list. These are

species that were determined by federal wildlife agencies to be deserving of protection, however, there are not enough funds to support the protection of these species. There are 1456 species that are listed under the act. The numbers may be overwhelming, but the success of the act has been clear. From the years of 1973 to 1998, about 172 species would have gone extinct had the act not been implemented. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 99 percent of the species that were listed in the Endangered Species Act have avoided extinction. 68 percent of the species that are on the list have populations that are either stable or improving, with only 32 percent declining.

The numbers do not lie, the ESA works. But it is not perfect. Instead of having politicians that are bought out by the fossil fuel industry trying to curb back the power of the Endangered Species Act, we should have lawmakers strengthen the act. It's a program that works and it benefits an industry that is actively growing. At an annual revenue of \$108 billion, fishing and wildlife watching is considered the seventh largest corporation in America. The hunting and fishing employ as many as 2.6 million people. This is a large industry that is growing, unlike the fossil fuels industry, where many coal plants are closing all around the country as renewables are beginning to outpace fossil fuels.

Our nation is built on exploring the wilderness and appreciating the natural world that we live in. We created the National Parks System, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act. Some of us understand that we need to protect these sources of natural wonder so that future generations could appreciate and enjoy the same things that we do now. We should not allow a few companies determine what species will survive the decade. But even now, our agencies that were once made to protect our natural lands are lead by fossil fuel advocates and lobbyists. Some

examples would be Scott Pruitt of the EPA, who has been a staunch opponent to environmental regulations, or the second-in-command of the Department of Interior, David Bernhardt, who was a lobbyist of gas and oil industries.

To protect the natural areas and species of the United States, we can no longer trust our government to do the right thing. We must make our voices heard and demand that endangered species must be protected.

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