

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 28, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

We write today to express our great concern over a number of extremely damaging provisions included in both the House and Senate FY 2016 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bills. These provisions undermine the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and harm individual species at risk of extinction. We urge you to maintain steadfast opposition to all of these provisions and continue to refuse to approve any final spending bill that includes them.

We appreciate the strong Statement of Administration Policy (SAP) you issued on June 23, opposing sections of H.R. 2822 that would result in “limiting the ability of the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service] to properly protect, based on the best available science, a number of species, including the greater sage grouse, northern long-eared bat, and certain gray wolf populations.¹” We agree with you that all of these species must be managed according to science, not politics.

Since issuance of the SAP, though, House Republicans have doubled down on their quest to erode protections provided under the Endangered Species Act. Policy riders added on the House floor include language detrimental to the survival and recovery of the Sonoran Desert tortoise and several species of freshwater mussels, as well as language that would limit access to the courts for Americans who value biodiversity.

The ESA is a bedrock environmental law that for over forty years has protected our irreplaceable and iconic American wildlife and landscapes. It has been ninety-nine percent effective, preventing the extinction of hundreds of plants and animals, including the peregrine falcon, the Florida manatee, the American alligator and our nation’s symbol, the bald eagle.

The American public strongly supports the ESA – a national poll conducted in June found that ninety percent of American voters support this critical law.² Moreover, the global outrage over

¹ https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/legislative/sap/114/saphr2822r_20150623.pdf

² <http://www.defenders.org/publications/Defenders-of-Wildlife-National-ESA-Survey.pdf>

the killing this summer in Zimbabwe of the iconic African lion known as Cecil demonstrates the popularity and importance of protecting the Earth's wildlife. We need the ESA now more than ever – the rate of species extinction is at its highest point since the extinction of the dinosaurs sixty-five million years ago, with human activity – including significant ecological impacts from climate change – initiating a mass extinction episode on our planet.³

Despite the critical need for this landmark law and its popularity and proven success, the ESA is under unprecedented attack in this Congress. Republicans have put forth more than eighty proposals that would undermine key components of the law or block protections for individual species. A number of these proposals – more than ever before – have been included in both House and Senate FY 2016 Interior appropriations bills in an attempt to have them signed into law as part of a must-pass deal to fund the federal government. Allowing any of these provisions to pass as part of an annual appropriations package, a continuing resolution, or other priority legislation such as the National Defense Authorization Act would do fundamental damage to the ESA and would invite more such attacks in the future.

Again, we urge you to ensure that all of these damaging attacks on the ESA are removed from any final bill to fund the federal government. We are confident you agree that we owe it to our children and grandchildren to be good stewards of our environment and leave behind a legacy of protecting our natural heritage for future generations of Americans, and we stand ready to assist you in that effort. Thank you for your consideration.


Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva

Ranking Member

Committee on Natural Resources



Niki Tsongas

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Federal Lands



Debbie Dingell

Member of Congress

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations



Mike Thompson

Member of Congress



Anna Eshoo

Member of Congress

³ <http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/1/5/e1400253.full>; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/22/earth-extinction-phase_n_7629330.html

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