Extinction Plan

Ten Species Imperiled by the Trump Administration

2018

EXTINCTION PLAN

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Cover: Loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). Christian Vizl/Wildscreen

Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

The Endangered Species Act works. It saves plants and wildlife, and has been a global model of environmental protection for 45 years. Under the Act, species rebound and recover: the bald eagle, the Tennessee purple coneflower, the Santa Cruz Island fox, and the American alligator are only a few of many examples. We should be celebrating.

But many of President Trump's appointees, including administrators and top staff at the Department of the Interior, have worked for decades to weaken protections for imperiled wildlife. The administration has taken strong anti-wildlife policy stances, from allowing lead ammunition in national wildlife refuges to weakening protections against trafficking of endangered animals.

Their most dangerous position, so far, is a set of proposed regulations—essentially, an extinction plan—that was constructed by Deputy Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt, a long-time oil and gas lobbyist.

These regulations would encourage agencies to undertake costly, unnecessary, and potentially unreliable economic analyses, instead of relying solely on science, when listing a species. The regs would also hamstring—or even, in some situations, eliminate—interagency consultations. Federal agencies could take actions that harm endangered species without considering certain threats or the already-dire status of species. In effect, the new regulations could drive species to extinction.

Populations could be removed from the threatened and endangered lists even before they've reached their recovery plan goals. And newly listed species that are categorized as threatened instead of endangered would no longer receive automatic protections. They could wait months or even years before safeguards are enacted—that is, if protections are *ever* enacted. And a delay of months or years might be too long.

Under the administration's new regulations, critical habitat that these species rely on would be at risk, too. The regs would prioritize only habitat occupied by species at the time of listing, and ignore other areas that the species relied on, even shortly before the listing takes place. This virtually ensures that species will never return to their native range. The new habitat rules would also make it harder to protect species from climate change, which is the greatest threat to most species on Earth.

And there's more, but you get our drift. If these regulations go through, our Endangered Species Act will be on the endangered list, itself.

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American Bird Conservancy

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Animal Welfare Institute

Kierán Suckling
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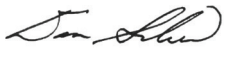

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Poison Peril:

Administration says yes to lead ammunition on public lands

California condor

Gymnogyps californianus

With one flap of its enormous 10-foot wingspan, a California condor can glide silently, and with breathtaking grace, for miles. The largest land birds in North America, they reach altitudes of 15,000 feet and speeds of 55 mph, and can soar 200 miles in a single day. They have flown throughout the West and in skies over Mexico for thousands of years, and are symbolically important to numerous Native American tribes. World-class scavengers, condors clean up our messes: garbage, roadkill, carcasses left behind by hunters. But our messes can kill them—trash full of toxins, and carrion laced with lead. And with unusually strong digestive acids, California condors are highly susceptible. More condors **die in the wild from lead poisoning**—as many as 50 percent of deaths—than from all other causes combined.

With one flap of its enormous 10-foot wingspan, a California condor can glide silently, and with breathtaking grace, for miles.

Ravaged by poisoning, poachers, turbines, and powerlines, the California condor population shrank to fewer than 30 by 1982. In 1987, all survivors were captured and enrolled in breeding facilities. Following successful reintroductions in California, Arizona, and Mexico, more of these birds are again flying free. In 2017, there were 290 individuals in the wild, and an additional 173 in breeding programs. But these fragile, small populations are not self-sustaining; **more perished last year than were fledged from nests in the wild**. And they are extremely vulnerable to catastrophic events.

And the Trump Administration, in a handshake with the National Rifle Association, has created such an event. On his first day in office, Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke **rolled back the Obama Administration's legislation banning use of lead ammunition** in critical condor habitat. Catastrophic. And this action, by this administration, may be the death knell for California condors.

Population: Fewer than 500

Status: Critically Endangered

Range: Currently, mountains of southern and central CA, AZ, UT, and Baja California and Mexico

Habitat: Canyons, gorges, forested regions with rocky cliffs

California condor, Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge, California. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

In Hot Water:
Discounting impacts of climate change

Above: Leatherback hatchlings emerging from nest, Eagle Beach, Aruba. Elise Peterson

Young loggerhead sea turtle near Panama City, Florida. NOAA

Leatherbacks & Loggerheads

Pacific leatherback sea turtle (Dermochelys coriacea)
Loggerhead sea turtle (Caretta caretta)

Sea turtles—what's not to love? They symbolize good luck, endurance, and a long life. They are talismans to indigenous groups throughout the Pacific, and beloved by people around the globe.

In Hindu mythology, a turtle holds up the world.

Leatherbacks and loggerheads have a lot in common. Both swim for thousands of miles on transoceanic journeys—the leatherback, from feeding to breeding grounds; the loggerhead, in its journey to adulthood. They help maintain balance in their ocean habitat, and provide essential nutrients to the beaches where they nest. And they contribute to our economy. A single loggerhead center in Florida pulls in about $60 million in tourist trade each year. But these turtles also swim in dire straits. Even as both species are protected under the Endangered Species Act, they are vulnerable to human activities. Thousands are snared in fishing nets and die each year. Only a portion of their sea-and-sand habitats is currently protected, but both homes are being hit hard by climate change.

The Trump Administration's new regulations **talk about climate change with language that allows leeway** when it comes to listings and how a habitat is, or isn't, protected. These turtles will need additional protected areas to buffer them from impacts of climate change. But if this new language kicks in, it will give the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) **a green light to ignore protections in that habitat altogether**. And under the new regs, if the FWS deems that an area will be lost to climate change, anyway, other agencies won't have to consult with them before taking actions there.

Leatherbacks and loggerheads, already facing myriad threats from mankind, **could lose their fragile beach nesting grounds entirely** as sea levels rise and severe storms become the norm.

Pacific Leatherback sea turtles

Population: Approximately 2,000 adults in two Pacific populations

Status: ESA Endangered; IUCN Critically Endangered

Range: Western subpopulation: California to Malaysia; eastern subpopulation: Mexico and South America

Habitat: Terrestrial (nesting beaches), coastal and open ocean (juveniles and adults).

Loggerhead sea turtles

Population: Unknown; rough estimate is 36,000 – 67,000 nesting females

Status: Four subpopulations listed as Threatened; five subpopulations listed as Endangered

Range: Temperate habitats in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans

Habitat: Terrestrial (nesting beaches), estuarine and open ocean

Science Dismissed:
Delisting could happen without conclusive evidence

Red wolf

Canis rufus

Declared extinct in the wild in 1980, red wolves were reintroduced in North Carolina in 1987 through a successful experimental breeding program that became a global model. But this fragile population, **with fewer than 30 individuals still in the wild**, is again on the edge of extinction.

Red wolves are only found in a five-county area in northeastern North Carolina—nowhere else. They contribute to their ecosystem by eating nutria, which are considered an invasive species, while also reducing the impact of deer, rabbits, and rodents on crops.

This fragile population, with fewer than 30 individuals still in the wild, is again on the edge of extinction.

Under the proposed regulations, the Trump Administration could **justify delisting the red wolf on the basis of any new information**, even though red wolf genetics are still under active scientific investigation, and the scientific community has not reached any consensus on the red wolf's taxonomy.

This species is far from recovered, and delisting would deal it a fatal blow. Even before the new rules were proposed, these wolves were in danger due to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's active mismanagement. In June 2018, the Service announced a proposal that would **reduce this wolf's habitat by 90 percent and allow unlimited kills**, without consequence, on private and state lands. The proposal represents the largest obstacle blocking this fragile population's recovery. And it demonstrates the administration's across-the-board neglect that clearly harms—and could entirely destroy—these wolves.

Population: Fewer than 30 in the wild; 200 in captive breeding programs

Status: Critically Endangered

Range: Northeast North Carolina

Habitat: Forest, coastal prairies, occasionally swamplands

Red wolf at Species Survival Plan facility, Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium, Tacoma, WA.
B. Bartel, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Money Matters:
Economics of logging, coal, and oil could cloud a listing

Hellbender

Cryptobranchus alleganiesis

Slimy and mud-brown or speckled gray like a river rock, with flappy skinfolds the length of its body. Lidless eyes that can't see much, but light-sensitive cells covering its skin. A superb sense of smell: One tiny whiff of worm juice, and it's time to scramble for supper. Tipping the scales at more than 5 pounds. Chubby toes for clinging to the river bottom. And this ancient salamander lives its solitary life under a single boulder, never even thinking about relocating.

They look like they come from the underworld, and like they're goin' back there.

Hellbenders—lasagna lizards, Allegheny alligators—may look downright dreadful, but they pose no threat to humans. Largest amphibians this side of Asia, they feast on insects and small fish, and are eaten, in turn, by snakes, turtles, and larger fish. And they are a vital indicator of water quality: They thrive in clean streams, but when their habitat deteriorates, so do they. Hellbenders have been around for tens of thousands of years, **but populations have dropped by as much as 70 percent** across most of their range. Water pollution, dams, and disease.

The hellbender is under review for Endangered Species Act listing. But they may not make it. *Solely on science* has always been the guidance for listing decisions. But the Trump Administration's proposed regulations are tailored to **dilute science by including economic analyses in the mix**. Analyses with so broad a monetary range—from ten cents to tens of millions of dollars—that they are all but meaningless. Engineered solely to **increase the controversy around listings**. But still an influencing factor. And so economics—of logging, mining, and fossil fuel extraction—could cloud a listing for this species. And those big businesses could also cloud the hellbender's habitat beyond repair.

Population: Unknown, but estimated to have declined by up to 70 percent

Status: Under review for listing under the Endangered Species Act

Range: New York to Mississippi and Virginia to Illinois

Habitat: Fast-flowing, well-oxygenated rivers and streams

The Eastern Hellbender. Freshwaters Illustrated/Dave Herasimtschuk, Creative Commons

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Big Gaming:

Trophy hunting gets a thumbs up; petition for protections is ignored

Giraffe

Giraffa camelopardalis

Six-foot-long legs, a six-foot-long neck. Elastic blood vessels designed to prevent fainting from a terra-to-tree-top head swing. The world's tallest mammal. Highly social animals that roam in groups called towers. *Towers!*

And those familiar, patterned coats? Each is unique, just like your fingerprints.

Giraffes, emblematic of Africa's savannah, no longer inhabit their historic range throughout that continent. Hunting and habitat encroachment have **reduced populations by more than 30 percent in just 30 years**. They appear to have already gone extinct in seven countries.

A burgeoning trade in giraffe parts—including hides and bones—and trophy hunting are two of the most significant threats to giraffes. And yet, **this elegant animal is not protected**, either internationally or under the Endangered Species Act. Listing by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species would place some controls on international trade. And listing under the Endangered Species Act would limit the trade here in the U.S.

The Trump Administration has been petitioned to list giraffes under the Act, but hasn't responded. Instead, they've done quite the opposite, with Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke creating an International Wildlife Conservation Council full of NRA members **to promote and expand international trophy hunting**. Maybe this shouldn't surprise us. After all, the Trump family's support for trophy hunting is clear.

But the administration's actions—and lack of actions—certainly should dismay us. And if giraffes go extinct, the ecological ripples will be felt throughout the African savannah, from ant colonies to acacia trees.

Population: Fewer than 100,000 in 2015

Status: Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List; two subspecies categorized as Red List Endangered

Range: Fragmented distribution in sub-Saharan Africa

Habitat: Savannas, grasslands, open woodlands

Giraffes in Kouré Reserve, Niger.
Clémence Delmas, Wikimedia Commons


Safeguards Lost:
(Merely) threatened could mean few protections
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Humboldt marten

Martes caurina humboldtensis

The size of a kitten, and related to mink and otters, the Humboldt marten is a stealthy hunter that lives in deeply tangled forest pockets—tiny hideaways like the nooks and crannies of fairy tales, where animals have space to keep their secrets.

So secretive is the Humboldt marten that only a few photos of them, taken by remote-sensing cameras, exist.

This carnivore was thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered in 1996. Now eliminated from virtually all of its historic habitat, the coastal old-growth forests in Northern California and Oregon, the marten's survival is in jeopardy.

Only four separated populations remain, imperiled by low population size and vast clear-cuts that keep them apart. Humans have put the marten at risk by trapping them for their fur and logging their rainforest habitat. These fierce little predators can tangle with porcupines, but they can't face down threats like wildfires, vehicle strikes, and the poisons used to grow marijuana. Fewer than 400 remain, yet years after conservationists petitioned for its protection, **the Humboldt marten is still only under consideration for listing.** They currently receive no federal protections.

Under court order, the Trump Administration finally proposed to list the Humboldt marten under the Endangered Species Act, but to classify it only as threatened. And under the regs, **a species listed as threatened no longer receives the same protections as one that's listed as endangered**. In a gift to industry, a special rule largely exempts the logging operations that have pushed the marten to the brink of extinction.

Our chances of ever seeing this adorable mammal? Extraordinarily slim. But those chances will drop to absolute zero if the Trump Administration has its way. Without full protection, the Humboldt marten could vanish entirely.

Population: Fewer than 400

Status: Proposed for listing as threatened

Range: Coastal northern California and southern Oregon

Habitat: Deep old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest

Humboldt marten image taken by remotely activated camera.
Mark Linnell, U.S. Forest Service

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No Home Security:

Habitat crucial to recovery could be unprotected

Rusty patched bumble bee

Bombus affinis

Something buzzing your ear? Could be a rusty patched bumble bee. They're trying to get our attention. They need our help.

The rusty patched bumble bee is the first bee in the continental United States to be listed under the Endangered Species Act—but not without a fight. The paperwork was delayed on Trump's first day in office, when the new administration **put a hold on protections for the bee** just before it was due to be listed. After a legal fight, the rusty patched bumble bee was finally listed just last year. But they still need our help.

A buzz pollinator that works its magic with a shimmy that other bees simply can't do.

This bumble bee is a major pollinator, an agricultural task master with the skills to bring blueberries and cherries and plums to your table—a buzz pollinator that works its magic with a shimmy that other bees simply can't do. But they've **vanished from almost 90 percent of their historic range**, thanks to disease, habitat degradation, and aggressive use of pesticides. This disappearance is why the bee now receives federal protection. But there's a catch.

The Trump Administration's proposed regs prioritize protection of habitat currently occupied by the species, **making it more difficult to protect unoccupied habitat crucial to the bee's recovery**. So, ironically, the reason these bees desperately need protection—their rapid and widespread disappearance—would also limit protections for the habitat the bee once called home. That's some catch.

And it might be a deadly one too, because without safeguards for their historic habitat, these bees could be gone for good.

Population: Unknown

Status: Endangered

Range: Ten U.S. states: IL, IN, IA, ME, MA, MN, OH, VA, WV, and WI; Ontario, CA.

Habitat: Grasslands and tall-grass prairies

Rusty patched bumble bee.
Mark Willden, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

No Safe Harbor:

Segmenting habitat, disregarding dangers

West Indian manatee

Trichechus manatus

A life of leisure, one might say. Eating, relaxing, and slow winter swims in warm southern waters. A deep, salty nap interrupted only by surfacing for the next breath every 20 minutes or so. Summers off the mid-Atlantic, with occasional trips to New England. Winters spent turning a wrinkled, whiskery face to Floridian sun. Life should be so sweet.

This plant-eating, fully aquatic mammal's closest relatives span a curious spectrum: At one end lumbers the elephant, and at the other scampers the hyrax, which looks like a pudgy, round-eared, tailless rabbit. Manatees weigh in in the middle around an easy thousand pounds. Many live to a ripe old 60 or so. They have no natural enemies. And then we walked in and changed all of that.

Winters spent turning a wrinkled, whiskery face to Floridian sun. Life should be so sweet.

Hacked by propellers. Smashed in watercraft collisions. Drowned in canal locks. Tortured and killed by a diet of fishhooks, litter, and lines. These are daily dangers we've imposed on these gentle ambassadors. But the biggest threat to manatees is habitat loss coming in red tides, algae blooms, and pollution. And even as we watched the impacts of these threats grow worse, the manatee was **downlisted by the Trump Administration from endangered to threatened**.

And the new rules? Manatees live in scattered populations throughout their range. The proposed regs **ignore impacts to habitat unless those impacts occur *across the species' entire habitat***, affecting the habitat as a whole. So horrors in waters over here, disasters in waters over there, will no longer be linked, and protections won't be necessary.

A slow life, and a slow death. Death by a thousand cuts.

Population: 13,000 range-wide, with approximately 6,500 in U.S. waters

Status: Downlisted to Threatened in 2017

Range: Florida and the Caribbean

Habitat: Both fresh and salt waters

Save the Manatee®

West Indian manatee mom and calf in in the waters of Florida. Psyberartist, Creative Commons.

Plowing Through:
Reducing interagency talks would green-light habitat destruction

San Bernardino kangaroo rat

Dipodomys merriami parvus

San Bernardino kangaroo rats are cheeky little rodents. Quite literally. They stuff their specialized, fur-lined face pouches to just-about-bursting with seeds that they then cache for future reference. About 4 inches long, and with tails even longer, they hop about on oversized hind feet, seeking sunny, sandy bowls, preferably near their burrows, for dust baths. The after-bath oils they leave behind are like little greeting cards for friends and family in the floodplain habitat they call home.

This species' very survival depends on natural cycles of wet and dry.

Never needing to drink, the kangaroo rat gains all its moisture from food, and its food from plants that mature at just the right time and produce seeds at just the right rate. And green vegetation stimulates their reproduction, like a go-ahead light for the next generation. But just the right amount of green, and not too much. Everything in moderation. A fragile balance.

Human activities, including mining, dams, and development, have dramatically impacted the San Bernardino kangaroo rat. Its habitat has been **reshaped by flood control measures serving residential and commercial sprawl**. That critical wet-dry balance, so vital to their existence? Altered, compromised, disrupted. And with Southern California's appetite for development, the Trump Administration's new regulations could predict the future for this endangered species. New rules would require much less consultation between agencies, **allowing them to ignore immediate and surrounding impacts of what they do**—even ignore the impact of something so substantial as a new road. *If we don't talk about it, we don't have to take responsibility for it.*

Under the proposed regulations, this furry little creature—and its fascinating life with floods and friends and dust and dry—might be forced to hop to extinction.

Population: Three fragmented, isolated populations

Status: Endangered

Range: Small portions of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, CA

Habitat: Sagebrush ecosystem along river washes

San Bernardino kangaroo rat.
Marshal Hedin

~~Survival~~ of the Fittest:

With delisting on the table, recovery goals are optional

Western yellow-billed cuckoo

Coccyzus americanus occidentalis

Summers spent in the wilds of the western United States, with willows and cottonwoods, and rivers running through. Winters? Somewhere way south, though it's a bit of a mystery. But whether feeding, breeding, or traveling its migratory route, this bird is at home where water meets woods. Retiring types, these cuckoos often avoid detection, even as they hunt caterpillars and other prey. A researcher once clocked a full hour, waiting for a bird to budge. (It didn't.) But this cuckoo is not just hiding from sight; it's disappearing altogether. Only about 2,000 remain.

A researcher once clocked a full hour, waiting for a bird to budge. (It didn't.)

With a diminishing population reeling from habitat loss, the western yellow-billed cuckoo was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 2014. But its **critical habitat, with corresponding protections, still hasn't been designated**. Meanwhile, issues around water management, residential development, and livestock grazing threaten this species' remaining habitat. And industrial enterprises in the western yellow-billed cuckoo's neighborhood have caught this administration's ear, resulting in decision-making based on politics, not science. Instead of the needed habitat restoration, **a delisting review is front and center on the table**.

And under new regulations proposed by the Trump Administration, a delisting could be uncoupled from the species' recovery plan. Yes, **the goals in a recovery plan would not have to be met before a species is delisted**. Species with recovery plans tend to recover faster than species without such plans: It's not rocket science—it's tried-and-true conservation. For the western yellow-billed cuckoo, this change-up could be a shortcut to extinction.

Population: About 2,000

Status: Threatened, proposed for delisting

Range: Southwestern United States

Habitat: Riparian woodlands

Yellow-billed Cuckoo in over-wintering habitat in Colombia.
Nick Bayley, SELVA

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