

January 22, 1973, Roe versus Wade was passed to protect a woman's ability to choose to have an abortion or continue a pregnancy. Within that same year, the Endangered Species Act would be passed to protect biodiversity in critical habitat areas. However, the average global citizen could describe Roe v. Wade in much more detail than the ESA despite the ESA's critical protection of endangered species and its impact on ecology. To illustrate the importance of the ESA and its history, here are three major takeaways to understand how the ESA operates.

First, the ESA outlines a framework to protect the habitats of listed endangered species. Habitat is one of the essential environmental requirements that an endangered species requires to survive and reproduce. Without an appropriate habitat, it becomes more challenging to meet the goals of recovery and conservation. Therefore, the ESA not only recognizes and researches species in need of protection but also actively works to restore their natural habitats.

Additionally, poaching and the importing or exporting of endangered species are components of our vocabulary, but the ESA also helps regulate this illegal and devastating trade. Specifically, the ESA prohibits "any action that causes a "taking" of any listed species of endangered fish or wildlife." Likewise, import, export, interstate, and foreign commerce of listed species are all generally prohibited under the ESA to support endangered species populations. While hunting and fishing may be recreational and commercial activities for some, these practices can become unsustainable when the targeted prey is already struggling to repopulate.

Finally, by infusing tribal, regional, and federal voices on various levels, the ESA has diversified its approach to protecting endangered species. From Native American tribes to varied regional interests, the United States is united by many diverse cultures. By recognizing the

voices of the local communities closely interconnected with a specific population, the ESA crafts effective solutions to aid endangered species populations.

Since the passage of the ESA in 1973, the federal government has listed more than 1,600 species as endangered and saved hundreds of other species. It is actively upholding this critical piece of conservation legislation by prioritizing “critical habitat areas,” prohibiting the illegal acts of harming or killing listed species, and consulting different parties and diverse perspectives as mechanisms of recovery.

However, more must be done by the public to advance the goals and outreach of the ESA. Without the ESA, humanity would have to deal with the tremendous loss of life and lack of public awareness of endangered species across the country.

After all, humans are the ultimate keystone species. By simply being human, we are a member of a species that is vital because it holds an ecosystem together. Without a keystone species, an ecosystem will collapse, but with it, life will continue to flourish.

With this crucial and unique role in our hands, it is up to humanity to help rewild ecosystems and protect species from our actions of destruction. We have already demonstrated our ability to destroy habitats and decimate populations while simultaneously protecting them.

Protecting endangered species is more than ensuring that the monarch butterflies complete their crucial migration, the North Atlantic Right Whales continue to support marine ecosystems, or that sea turtles can continue to repopulate along coasts.

Protecting endangered species is also the prerequisite for nature’s survival.

Take two well-known cases of saving endangered species: wolf reintroduction to Yellowstone National Park and the bald eagle

In the 1930s, wolves were decimated to preserve elk populations. This simple solution to an aesthetic and predatory issue would eventually shed light on the wolves' integral role in the Yellowstone ecosystem. The absence of wolves allowed elk populations to flourish but at the expense of the ecosystem. Without wolves, the elks' exponential and unsustainable growth destroyed native tree populations, which beaver and bird populations depended on. Conservation projects reintroduced wolf populations to regulate the park's delicate and complex ecosystem, demonstrating that "just one species" may be the lifeblood of nature itself.

Likewise, throughout the 1960s and 70s, public disapproval advocated banning the DDT pesticide, which was linked to the decline of bald eagles. Scientific research combined with public concern rescued America's national bird from the Endangered Species List and demonstrated why the ESA is powerful and effective.

Without biodiversity, ecosystems are unlikely to flourish. Likewise, without a bountiful habitat of our own, abundant with everything from microorganisms to whales, human existence is improbable. In the grand scheme of life, it is an individual and collective obligation to support the ESA on the grounds of conservation and beauty of nature.

Every individual is a citizen scientist and a global member of biodiversity. Although it may seem astonishing that each individual can choose a side between the delicate balance of an ecosystem's life or death, protecting endangered species is one way humans can ensure they are walking on a path of progress.

Working in the face of a changing climate, the effort to preserve biodiversity, habitats, and endangered species is in our hands, and it starts with the ESA.

Sources:

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[Wolf Reintroduction Changes Yellowstone Ecosystem](#)