

Endangered Species: The ESA Is Just an Act

A ghostly birdsong floated through the Hawaii woodland breeze in mid-April of 1987. It was the last Kaua'i 'ō'ō singing for a mate. It never heard a response. The Kaua'i 'ō'ō was decimated by invasive species and habitat loss. This splendid bird and many other living beings would still be heard around the United States now if we had a better-funded Endangered Species Act. The Endangered Species Act was passed in 1973, and its purpose was to preserve threatened species. Species could only be protected once they got through the extensive process of being added to the list. At the time, the United States government thought they had resolved the problem of extinction. Now the truth is becoming visible – populations are declining faster than ever before. Part of the federal government's budget should be used for implementing and enforcing the Endangered Species Act because it's not doing its job, conservation is barely funded, and endangered species populations are still dropping.

The Endangered Species Act is not doing what it was supposed to do. Former Rocky Mountain Wild Senior Staff Biologist Erin Robertson says the Endangered Species Act was created for much more than just helping threatened species stay alive. “The Endangered Species Act was designed to protect ecosystems - once a species was designated as Threatened or Endangered, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was supposed to designate Critical Habitat required to conserve the species. Protecting a species was supposed to protect many of the other plants, animals, waters, and even the air within its designated Critical Habitat.” (Robertson 2023) This means the Endangered Species Act was made to help all organisms surrounding the endangered species. Instead, only the threatened species are barely being kept alive. This reveals the federal government must put more funding into enforcing the Act so it can do what it was truly meant to do. If the Endangered Species Act were well-funded, not only could endangered species recover but the species surrounding them won't have to face the same dangers of extinction. Even with well-written laws, conservation is impossible without funding.

Conservation is failing because it isn't funded adequately . Only a budget focused on our natural world more than our military can help create a flourishing ecological nation. According to Center for Biological Diversity Senior Endangered Species Policy Specialist Stephanie Kurose, money is needed to ameliorate the situation. “The Senate needs to do more than the bare minimum if it truly wants to stop extinction, and that starts with fully funding the Endangered Species Act. Tragically, hundreds of species are being left at the brink of extinction simply because there isn't enough money to help them recover. Next year's appropriations must reflect the dire straits of the crisis we face.” This means the natural world continues to be ravaged by the absence of money to help recover plants and animals. Furthermore, the \$330 million used for conservation is less than one five-thousandth of the military budget. If the USA funded

conservation with even just \$700 million, money that the government certainly has, our natural world could recover from the destruction of the last century. Despite the strong evidence shown for the need for conservation funding, there are some who propose the budget should go somewhere else.

Some may argue that since the Endangered Species Act is written in law it does not require more funding. Certainly, the funding can be used for building infrastructure or helping our military. However, endangered species populations are still dropping and our natural world is more important than making more killing machines. Lacey McCormick, Senior Communications Manager of the National Wildlife Federation states, “As many as one-third [or 990] of America’s wildlife species are at increased risk of extinction,” (McCormick 2018). Without proper conservation we could witness an extinction event $\frac{1}{3}$ the size of the Permian extinction, the largest species loss of all time. With these statistics we cannot kid ourselves into thinking funding belongs somewhere else. We have decimated the environment of the United States, and are finally seeing what the repercussions are.

The federal government must recognize endangered species by funding and reinforcing the Endangered Species Act. It’s not doing what it was designed to do. Funding for conservation is hard or impossible to find, and living beings are still dying. The Endangered Species Act is failing to save plants and animals around the nation. Conservationists, trying to do what the government cannot, fail to find enough money to stop the raging destruction of species loss. Our nation’s birds and mammals, our fishes and plants are all still dying, and they are dying because of us. It is our job to fix it. Please consider proposing more funding for conservation to Senate. The life around us which gives us air, food, and shelter needs protection now more than ever.

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