

April 15, 2026

Dear Member of Congress,

From the Everglades to the Gulf Coast, from our springs to our reefs, the survival of threatened and endangered species is directly tied to the resilience of Florida's tourism industry, our fisheries, our outdoor recreation economy, and the quality of life that attracts families and businesses to our state. As Floridians, we take pride in our incredible biodiversity and depend on it for our way of life. We write to urge you to **oppose the ESA Amendments Act of 2025 (H.R. 1897)** and its component titles. The bill rewrites the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in a manner that undermines our efforts to preserve and recover Florida's most at-risk animals, plants, and habitats.

The ESA has conserved species like the bald eagle and American alligator, bringing them back from the brink of extinction. Florida's unique marine and terrestrial environments support more than a hundred species currently listed under the ESA, including the American manatee, all species of sea turtles, many species of coral found in Florida's coasts; Rice's whale, smalltooth sawfish, Key deer, Florida scrub-jay, and the Florida panther.

Florida's economy is the fourth-largest in the U.S., contributing more than \$1.7 trillion into the U.S. economy in 2024. As documented by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, recreational activity along Florida's coasts brings in hundreds of billions of dollars and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs each year. Millions of people visit Florida each year to enjoy our natural areas. Without protections for habitats and wildlife, the economic value of our natural resources to visitors will be greatly diminished.

Florida species protected under the Endangered Species Act drive significant economic activity through activities such as -

- Supervised "turtle walks" during sea turtle nesting season, eco-boat trips, and snorkeling excursions to witness Florida's iconic sea turtles in the wild;
- Guided paddle tours, boardwalk strolls, and abundant tourism activities for manatee sightseeing;
- Diving, snorkeling, and recreational fishing in coral reef habitats;
- Recreation in protected natural areas (i.e., National and state parks).

For over 50 years, the Endangered Species Act has provided a strong legal framework while facilitating collaboration among governments, conservation organizations, and community partners. Largely thanks to the ESA, green sea turtles have set record-high nest counts in recent years and Florida's loggerhead sea turtle aggregation is now the largest in the world. ESA protections helped bring American manatee numbers in the state from fewer than 1,000 to around 10,000, and Florida panther numbers from fewer than 30 to around 200. While full recovery of threatened and endangered species takes time, results in Florida are a testament to the necessity of the ESA.

Unfortunately, the ESA Amendments Act (H.R. 1897) adds no new science-based recovery measures for at-risk species and adds no new measures to stop the causes of wildlife extinction. Instead, H.R. 1897 -

- **Prevents reasonable measures to mitigate harm to listed species.** Under the current framework, if a federal agency action must hurt a listed species in one place, they can mitigate that loss by helping the species in another place, such as by restoring or protecting habitat elsewhere. H.R. 1897 explicitly prohibits this balanced approach.
- **Shrinks and fragments critical habitat.** Federal agencies would only be able to designate critical habitat where a threatened or endangered species currently exists, preventing the conservation of suitable habitat areas where the species could be reintroduced or grow into as they recover.
- **Eliminates key opportunities for public accountability and oversight over the federal government.** The bill prevents the public from reviewing, submitting comments, and challenging federal decisions that would harm listed species and remove their protections.
- **Overburdens state agencies.** While state agencies are essential partners for wildlife conservation, they lack sufficient resources and legal frameworks to be solely responsible for the monitoring and recovery of species at risk of extinction.
- **Creates a patchwork of insufficient protections.** Many threatened and endangered species range across multiple states or migrate during the year, and a national perspective is necessary for effective species recovery programs.

We respectfully ask you to oppose H.R. 1897 and instead uphold the science-based framework of the ESA as it is currently written. Weakening the ESA would harm Florida's wildlife and environment, as well as our communities and economy.

Thank you for your service to Florida and for considering our concerns.

Sincerely,

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