

April 22, 2019

The Honorable John Barrasso  
Chairman, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works  
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

As a coalition of organizations with a shared goal of “supporting the common interests of agriculture and conservation,” the steering committee members of the Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition (Steering Committee) write to offer our thoughts on the second iteration of your Endangered Species Act (ESA) reauthorization discussion draft. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. By engaging with a diverse set of stakeholders, using comments to inform drafts, and committing to move forward only with bipartisan support, you continue to demonstrate the seriousness with which you view ESA reauthorization.

The Steering Committee is unable to reach consensus on endorsement of the bill as written. However, we offer framing ideas, below, on the areas that we think could find broad support among multiple stakeholders as well as Members of Congress whose support is critical if any ESA reauthorization bill is to pass both chambers. Focusing on these discrete areas, we commit to further engagement with your staff and other stakeholders to better refine them to ensure that any changes to ESA: enhance implementation of this bedrock statute; do not diminish or weaken its core protections and authorities; enhance the recovery of listed species through stronger collaboration; and provide clear benefit to farmers and ranchers, species and ecosystems.

Many of the ideas in your discussion draft are derived from the Western Governors’ Association’s (WGA) *Species Conservation and Endangered Species Act Initiative* led by Governor Mead (WY). Diverse stakeholders, including several members of the WACC, discussed these ideas at length over the course of three years and we continue to think these are the most appropriate areas to seek bipartisan agreement.

Specifically, we recommend that the Committee focus its effort on the following priority concepts and sections of the discussion draft:

- **Recovery** (Section 202, State-Federal consultation relating to conservation and recovery of wildlife; Section 203, Recovery plans; Section 204, Recovery teams.)
- **Conservation Agreements** (Title III – Encouraging Conservation Activities Through Regulatory Certainty)
- **Full Disclosure** (Sections 402 & 403, Title IV Transparency)
- **Prioritization of Listing Determinations** (Title V – Optimizing Conservation Through Resource Prioritization)
- **Studies to Improve Conservation** (Title VI—Section 602 Conservation Factors and Section 603 ESA Expenditures)
- **Reauthorization** (Title VII – Reauthorization)

We note that some of our members continue to have concerns regarding some of the specific provisions in the sections identified above; however, we feel the ideas included in these sections of the bill draft merit further discussion and could be improved with stakeholder and bipartisan input to fulfill their intent. In particular, expansion upon the concepts raised within Titles III (Voluntary Conservation) and VII (Funding and Reauthorization) have the potential to create a strong, bipartisan bill.

We welcome your request for ideas to enhance funding to support ESA. While we are unable to offer Coalition consensus on funding specifics by your deadline, our members join you in recognition that the lack of funding for ESA remains a significant challenge and we fully commit to work with your and other committees of jurisdiction and other stakeholders to develop those specifics that would ensure robust funding for species recovery and conservation.

Given the longstanding acrimony around ESA, it is imperative that all who are interested in reauthorizing the law are able to build trust with one another. It is our feeling that by focusing on a meaningful set of priorities, identified above, that will improve the implementation of the Act is a way to do just that.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to weigh in on your discussion draft, as well as for the engagement of your staff. Matt Leggett, Andy Harding and Kaitlynn Glover

have been terrific to work with and we look forward to the continued engagement to craft legislation that can successfully be moved through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

Steering Committee Members of the Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition

Arizona Cattle Grower's Association, California Farm Bureau Federation,  
Environmental Defense Fund, Family Farm Alliance, Irrigation Association, The Nature  
Conservancy, Public Lands Council, Trout Unlimited, Wyoming Stock Grower's  
Association