



The Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition

July 17, 2018

Chairman John Barrasso

Ranking Member Thomas Carper

U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper:

As a coalition of organizations with a shared goal of “supporting the common interests of agriculture and conservation,” the Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition (WACC) writes to offer initial thoughts on your recently released discussion draft of proposed amendments to the Endangered Species Act (ESA). We urge that as you move this work forward, you continue to do so in a way that builds and maintains trust in the process. It is our hope that this discussion draft will be able to accomplish that.

The members of the WACC have been constructively engaged in the Western Governors’ Association’s (WGA) *Species Conservation and Endangered Species Act Initiative* since its inception, and we are supportive of its focus on species recovery and habitat improvements on working lands. We appreciate that you have released your discussion draft – based on recommendations from this process – as a starting point for further conversations and we appreciate your willingness to accept feedback and modifications to the discussion draft before introducing legislation. Only through true bipartisanship and broad stakeholder engagement will we create good policy, address the needs of communities and species, and eventually advance this ESA legislation.

While not contemplated in your discussion draft, we know that the lack of funding for ESA remains a significant challenge when it comes to species recovery and conservation. We commit to continuing to work with you and your Congressional colleagues and the administration to provide adequate funding for ESA programs and conservation programs vital for ensuring the protections of the ESA are not required for species in the first place. While all in our coalition acknowledge the need for adequate ESA programmatic funding, some believe that legislation such as yours could provide the structure needed to ensure good use of such funding. To that end, as these modifications to ESA are contemplated, we will work with you to ensure funding is appropriately looked at in ways that are meaningful to all stakeholders.

Given your commitment to a thoughtful, bipartisan approach to comprehensive reauthorization of ESA, you should know that some in our coalition find the ESA related amendments being advocated for in both the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and the FY19 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill detrimental to this process. At the same time, others in our coalition have supported such language out of frustration with the current implementation of the ESA. It is because of this shared frustration - across the spectrum - that as a coalition we seek to achieve a bipartisan reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act. Out of respect for this delicate and ongoing process, we ask that you work with Senate and House leadership to ensure that amendments of this type do not move forward while your work progresses.

Again, we appreciate your willingness to engage with, and seek ideas from, our coalition and other stakeholders. We look forward to working with your committee to offer comments, guided by our "Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition Common Endangered Species Act Principles" (attached). We welcome opportunities to discuss them with you and your staff as well as with Ranking Member Carper and minority staff.

Contact Jeff Eisenberg, coalition director, or any of the members of the coalition should you have any questions about these principles. Jeff's email is jeffeisenberg@rockspringrs.com. His telephone number is 571-355-3073.

Signed,

Steering Committee: Arizona Cattle Growers Association, California Farm Bureau Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, Family Farm Alliance, Irrigation Association, The Nature Conservancy, Public Lands Council, Trout Unlimited, Wyoming Stock Growers Association

Members: California Agricultural Irrigation Association, Montana Stock Growers Association, National Audubon Society, Oregon Water Resources Congress, Montana Stock Growers, Farmers Conservation Alliance, Western Growers