

Trump Administration Aims Wrecking Ball at Endangered Species Act

Unprecedented Rollback Could Doom Hundreds of Animals, Plants

By [Center For Biological Diversity](#)

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In a massive attack on imperiled wildlife, the Trump administration announced a series of rollbacks today to the regulations implementing key provisions of the Endangered Species Act.

The three proposed rules from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service would severely weaken protections for hundreds of endangered animals and plants across the country. They would also ensure that hundreds of imperiled species awaiting protection — like the monarch butterfly and the American wolverine — either never get safeguards or face additional, extinction-threatening delays.

One set of regulatory changes would weaken the consultation process designed to prevent harm to endangered animals and their habitats from federal agency activities. A second set of changes would curtail the designation of critical habitat and weaken the listing process for imperiled species. A third regulation would gut nearly all protections for wildlife newly designated as “threatened” under the Act.

The proposals are part of a broader effort by **Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke** to undercut protections for wildlife and public lands.

“These proposals would slam a wrecking ball into the most crucial protections for our most endangered wildlife,” said **Brett Hartl**, government affairs director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “If these regulations had been in place in the 1970s, the bald eagle and the gray whale would be extinct today. If they’re finalized now, Zinke will go down in history as the extinction secretary.”

Under the proposal relating to federal consultations, impacts to critical habitat will be ignored unless they impact the entirety of an animal’s habitat — ignoring the fact that “death by a thousand cuts” is the most common way wildlife declines toward extinction.

The proposal will also prohibit designation of critical habitat for species threatened by climate change, even though in many cases these species are also threatened by habitat destruction and other factors. The proposal will also preclude designation of critical habitat for areas where species need to move to avoid climate threats.

“This proposal turns the extinction-prevention tool of the Endangered Species Act into a rubber stamp for powerful corporate interests,” said Hartl. “Allowing the federal government to turn a blind eye to climate change will be a death sentence for polar bears and hundreds of other animals and plants.”

The regulatory proposal addressing listing and critical habitat designations will gut wildlife agencies’ ability to designate critical habitat in unoccupied areas needed for recovery. Even though most endangered species currently occupy small fractions of their historic range, those areas would effectively be precluded from ever helping a species recover.

“Ordinary Americans understand that many species of wildlife have drastically declined in recent years, and that if we are going to save wildlife, we have to let them return to places they used to roam. Denying imperiled wild animals that ability means they have no future,” said Hartl.

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