

POLICY POSITION



AMENDING THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Summary

OCC supports the amendment of the federal Endangered Species Act.

Date

November 2025

Oregon's citizens, forests, and wildlife have suffered damage due to the Endangered Species Act whose ecological benefits have not materialized. OCC supports amending this Act.

KEY TENETS

BACKGROUND

The 1973 Endangered Species Act (ESA) rests on contested science, is ambiguously written, often misapplied, and has failed to achieve its stated ecological goals.

For decades, ESA listings and management directives have contributed to major reductions in active forest management, resource industry decline, and the loss of family-wage jobs in rural communities. Large areas of Oregon's forests, previously cared for through responsible stewardship and sustainable harvest practices, have been left vulnerable to catastrophic wildfire due to limits on thinning, access, and active management. At the same time, several species subject to ESA protections in Oregon continue to decline even under the current regulatory framework, indicating that the existing approach is not effectively supporting wildlife recovery. One such listing was that of the Northern Spotted Owl whose flawed ESA protection left 26% of the 25 million acres set aside for them burned with an economic loss exceeding \$500 billion. Ironically, the owl's population has since declined by 92 percent.

Likewise, in 1995, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "reintroduced" Canadian gray wolves into western states under the ESA, despite the species being neither threatened nor endangered in Canada or Alaska, nor native to the lower 48. For decades, federal agencies have justified these wolf introductions under the ESA, even as the animals have preyed on livestock and pets on private land and contributed to steep reductions in deer and elk populations, particularly in eastern Oregon.

AMENDMENT GOALS

The ESA has been stretched far beyond its original intent; therefore, we support the following policy goals:

1. Prioritize Clear, Verifiable Science. ESA listings

and critical habitat designations should rely on transparent data and measurable biological criteria rather than speculative or uncertain classifications.

2. Focus Protections on At-Risk Species. Reforms should limit listings to species that are demonstrably threatened with extinction across their range, not isolated population segments or unconfirmed subspecies distinctions.

3. Restore Active Land Stewardship. Federal and state agencies should coordinate with local individuals and entities to ensure that forests and rangelands are managed to reduce wildfire risk and sustain ecological health.

4. Protect Community Stability and Property Rights. ESA implementation must prioritize economic impacts, community safety, and the rights of private property owners, particularly in rural areas where livelihoods are directly tied to natural resource management.

5. Promote Local Stakeholders. Wildlife recovery strategies should emphasize collaboration with local stakeholders with long-standing knowledge of Oregon's landscapes and species, including ranchers, foresters, tribes, and county resource boards. The OCC supports amending the ESA to explicitly recognize that human rights, community safety, and property rights take precedence over experimental policies such as the import and release of large predators from foreign regions into communities. Citizens have a fundamental right to live without government-imposed threats to their lives, livelihoods, and property.

In summary: Oregon's landscapes, communities, and natural resource heritage are deeply connected. Effective conservation must protect wildlife while respecting the people who work the land, depend on its resources, and live in the environments affected by federal regulation. The ESA as interpreted and applied, has not achieved this balance.