

Essential Question: Who has ownership and control over the earth's resources?

TOPIC 4: Should We Use Incentives to Preserve Species

Hundreds of Endangered Species Are on the Road to Recovery

*Environment News Service, "Success Stories Highlighted on First U.S. **Endangered Species** Day." www.ens-newswire.com. Reproduced by permission.*

*In this viewpoint, the independent daily newswire Environment News Service (ENS) highlights conservation success stories to show that many once-**endangered species** have not only been saved from extinction but are thriving in the United States. **Species** on the road to recovery include "key deer and green sea turtles in Florida, grizzly bears and wolves in Montana, sea otters and blue butterflies in California, and short-nose sturgeon and roseate terns in New York"—the ENS credits the **Endangered Species** Act of 1973 and dedicated conservation groups for this turnaround. ENS, founded in 1990 by editors Sunny Lewis and Jim Crabtree and based in Washington, D.C., and Honolulu, is a network of national and international correspondents who cover science and technology, land use, wildlife and marine life, renewable energy, legislation and politics, and other issues related to the environment.*

The U.S. Senate has declared May 11 to be Endangered Species Day. The resolution, passed unanimously on April 5 [2006], states that the purpose of the Day is to "encourage the people of the United States to become educated about, and aware of, threats to species, success stories in species recovery, and the opportunity to promote species conservation worldwide."

"California's conservation efforts have already helped restore California condor, winter run chinook salmon, and California gray whale populations," said Senator Dianne Feinstein of California, a Democrat, who introduced the legislation. "But more still needs to be done, and I hope that Endangered Species Day will spark wonder and interest in conservation efforts throughout the country."

There are at least 100 success stories among the more than 1,800 species now listed as threatened and endangered in the United States. To bring these conservation successes into the spotlight, the Center for Biological Diversity has created a website detailing the efforts [that] reversed the decline of these 100 endangered species in every U.S. state and territory.

Kieran Suckling, policy director of the Center for Biological Diversity, calls the Endangered Species Act [ESA] "one of America's most successful conservation laws."

"From key deer and green sea turtles in Florida, to grizzly bears and wolves in Montana, sea otters and blue butterflies in California, and short-nose sturgeon and roseate terns in New York, the Endangered Species Act has not only saved hundreds of species from extinction," said [Suckling] "but [has] put them on the road to recovery."

Is the **Endangered Species Act** Too Restrictive?

The positive focus on the conservation successes of the Endangered Species Act is an answer to the legislative attempt of Congressman Richard Pombo of California to revise the 1973 law to create bigger roles for state and local governments, protect private property owners, and eliminate critical habitat designations.

Pombo, a Republican who chairs the House Resources Committee, authored a bill that passed the House in September [2005] to revise the Endangered Species Act. Pombo and the bill's cosponsor, California Congressman Dennis Cardoza, a Democrat, believe the Endangered Species Act is increasingly driven by litigation, not science, and has become a burden on local economies and landowners.

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Pombo said in September that when their property is "taken" to protect endangered species, landowners must be compensated, "as the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution requires."

"Upholding this right and partnering with the landowner is the only way we are going to improve the ESA's failing results for recovery," Pombo said.

Success Stories

Conservationists support the act in its present form and point out the successes rather than the failures. The Endangered Species Act's best known successes include the U.S. national symbol, the bald eagle. Numbers increased from 417 pairs in 1963 to 9,250 pairs in 2006.

Saying the species is healthy now, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is acting on a 1999 proposal to remove the bald eagle from Endangered Species Act protection.

Once delisted from the Endangered Species Act, bald eagles will continue to be protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Both acts prohibit killing, selling or otherwise harming eagles, their nests or eggs. ...

The Center for Biological Diversity points to the story of the whooping crane as another success of the Endangered Species Act. Whooping crane numbers have increased from 54 birds in 1967 to 436 in 2003.

Fossilized remains of the whooping crane date back several million years. Once the large migratory birds inhabited an area from central Canada to Mexico, and from Utah to the Atlantic coast. The species range shrank rapidly after 1850, and breeding birds were extirpated in the United States, except in Louisiana, by the 1890s. Whooping cranes in Louisiana last nested in 1939 and disappeared by 1950.

The International Crane Foundation says the only remaining natural, self-sustaining flock of whooping cranes breeds in Wood Buffalo National Park in the Northwest Territories, Canada, and winters in Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. This natural flock reached a low of only 16 birds in the winter of 1941-1942, and numbered under 35 birds over the next two decades. Conservation efforts have increased this flock to almost 200 birds in 2003. A second flock was created by humans in 1993 in case disaster wiped out the natural flock.

Recovery of Species Includes Habitat Restoration

The story of a songbird known as the Kirtland's warbler is also a success, due to cooperation among the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Michigan Department of Military Affairs in restoring the warblers' nesting habitat. Numbers of Kirtland's warblers have increased from 210 pairs of birds in 1971 to 1,415 pairs in 2005, according to the DNR.

The Kirtland's warbler population depends on northern Michigan's jack pine barrens ecosystem for nesting habitat. The warbler nests on the ground and selects nesting sites in stands of jack pine between four and 20 years old.

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These stands of young jack pine once were created by natural wildfires that frequently swept through northern Michigan. Modern fire suppression programs have altered this natural process, reducing Kirtland's warbler habitat.

To mimic the effects of wildfire and ensure the future of this endangered species, state and federal wildlife biologists and foresters annually manage the forests through a combination of clearcutting, burning, seeding and replanting to promote warbler habitat.

"Additional new habitat will become available each year for the next several years, so we believe the warbler populations will remain stable or increase," said Elaine Carlson, DNR wildlife biologist. "The success of the Kirtland's warbler management program shows that scientific wildlife management works."

Mammal Comebacks

While birds have benefited from conservation efforts under the Endangered Species Act, mammals have as well.

Eastern North Pacific gray whales counted off the U.S. Pacific coast increased from 13,095 whales in 1968 to 26,635 whales in 1998, but have declined since then, according to researchers at the National Marine Mammal Laboratory (NMML).

A census in 2002 estimated 17,414 gray whales. This is below the estimate of 18,761 whales made during the 2000-01 count and well below the 1998 estimate.

NMML whale scientist Dave Rugh wrote that abundance may have declined following high mortality rates observed in 1999 and 2000, "probably a function of this population reaching its carrying capacity." During their annual migration along the coast, the gray whales pass through U.S. oil and gas exploration and development areas, shipping lanes, military test ranges and near coastal cities, from which whalewatchers embark.

The Center for Biological Diversity counts the grizzly bear as another Endangered Species Act success story. Grizzly numbers in the Yellowstone area increased from about 271 in 1975 to over 580 bears in 2005.

Once numbering at least 50,000, grizzly bears roamed the West, but just 136 individuals were still alive when the species was listed in 1975, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The bears' survival was jeopardized by loss of habitat and high mortality from conflict with humans. In November [2005] Interior Secretary Norton proposed to remove the greater Yellowstone population of grizzly bears from the Endangered Species List.

The Fish and Wildlife Service plan calls for returning grizzly bear management in the Yellowstone area to the governments of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho.

Environmentalists say the population has recovered somewhat but not enough. Some groups, such as the Natural Resources Defense Council, warn that the states of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho all have plans to allow grizzly hunting when the bears are delisted.

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Recovery of the Gray Wolf

Gray wolf populations have increased in the Northern Rockies, Southwest, and Great Lakes until now, [and] delisting proposals are in process for several of these populations.

Interior Secretary Gale Norton announced March 16 [2006], that gray wolves in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan have recovered from the threat of extinction, prompting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to propose removing the wolves in this region from the federal list of threatened and endangered species. The gray wolf population in the western Great Lakes region now numbers close to 4,000 animals over the three-state area. The Minnesota population has steadily expanded, Norton said. The latest estimate in 2003-2004 found about 3,020 animals.

Wolves have become well-established in Michigan, which has 405 animals now, and in Wisconsin where 425 wolves are found. Wolf numbers in those two states combined have exceeded 100 for the past 12 years, meeting the population criteria identified in the federal recovery plans. ...

In a separate action, the Service has announced its intention to propose delisting gray wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains.

Delisting proposals do not affect gray wolves in the Southwest, nor do they affect red wolves, a separate species found in the Southeast.

"This first-ever Endangered Species Day gives us a chance to celebrate America's commitment to protecting our unique wildlife," said Sarah Matsumoto of the Endangered Species Coalition.

"Endangered Species Day is a great opportunity for young and old alike to learn about our nation's wildlife and get involved in protecting endangered species and their habitat."