

July 27, 2011

Dear Member of Congress:

As former directors of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from both Democratic and Republican administrations, we are writing to express our respectful, but strong opposition to the proposed provision in the House Interior Appropriations bill prohibiting the Fish and Wildlife Service from spending any money on listing imperiled plants and animals under the Endangered Species Act, or protecting their critical habitat. This so-called "Extinction Rider" would likely increase the risk of extinction for hundreds of imperiled plants and animals, including more than 260 candidate species for which the Fish and Wildlife Service has already determined that listing under the Endangered Species Act is warranted. Some of the imperiled species that would be impacted include wolverine, Pacific walrus, Rio Grande cutthroat trout and red knot. Many of these species have been waiting for more than a decade to be protected under the Endangered Species Act and any further delay could consign them to extinction.

As professional wildlife biologists, we firmly believe that decisions regarding the conservation of imperiled plants and animals should be based on science and be made by qualified wildlife conservation professionals as provided by law. This principle has been at the foundation of the Endangered Species Act for almost four decades and has been widely embraced in a bipartisan manner for many years. The Extinction Rider is directly counter to this principle and establishes a dangerous precedent of substituting politically-based wildlife conservation decision-making for that based on science and law. Moreover, as history has demonstrated regarding previous riders preventing new species listings, this provision will be counterproductive in the long-run because it will make future efforts to conserve imperiled species more contentious, difficult, time-consuming and expensive.

Conserving America's rich wildlife heritage is one of our nation's proudest traditions and has been a model for the international community. The Endangered Species Act has consistently enjoyed broad public support. It has been exceedingly effective in preventing the extinction of hundreds of plants and animals and is our nation's most important law for ensuring the conservation of its rich biological heritage for future generations. The Extinction Rider will severely undermine the Endangered Species Act's effectiveness and place hundreds of imperiled plants and animals at further risk of extinction. We therefore respectfully urge you to support the amendment expected to be offered by Rep. Norm Dicks to strip this provision from the House Interior Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Lynn A. Greenwalt  
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (1973-1981)

John F. Turner  
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (1989-1993)

Jamie Rappaport Clark  
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (1997-2001)

Steve Williams  
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2002-2005)