



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**

ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

October 10, 2018

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman, Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce thanks you for your leadership in the development of the Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 is outdated and should be modernized. Emphasis on elevating states' role and increasing transparency in the implementation of the ESA is a welcomed and needed change. Agriculture is Mississippi's number one industry, and farmers and producers are critical to the protection of endangered and threatened species.

Mississippi has a robust history with regards to conservation and management of natural resources. Our state is predominantly rural and privately owned, with 36,200 farms, 10.7 million acres of farmed land, and 19.7 million acres of forestland. Farmers and landowners across the state work annually with state and federal agencies on important conservation issues and have had great success. From creating extensive critical habitat for black bears to bringing back the American alligator from near extinction, Mississippi is a leader in conservation. Our conservation success is a result of a great partnership among landowners, farmers, state and federal agencies, agricultural associations, and conservation associations. However, improvements to the ESA could be made that would better facilitate federal coordination with the states and their stakeholders.

Under the current ESA, listing decisions are often made without current, accurate, local data. Better decisions can be made with more input from local experts and stakeholders. Mississippi is fortunate to have access to applied conservation research and reliable scientific data. This access is through partnerships among various state agencies, universities, and private entities. Many of our university scientists are considered experts in their fields and are recognized nationally and internationally. State-led and university-conducted research has been instrumental in making conservation decisions for our state. Amendments to the ESA that elevate the role of states in listing decisions would provide opportunities to gain current localized data on species that are in need of protection.

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In closing, thank you once again for your consideration to expand the role of states and to increase transparency in implementation of the ESA. Mississippi agencies and stakeholders welcome the opportunity to improve conservation efforts in our state. We look forward to seeing improvements made to the ESA and the resulting benefits to the species that it is intended to protect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andy Gipson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andy Gipson
Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce