



ZACHARY RENSTROM, COMMISSION CHAIR | VICTOR IVERSON, COMMISSIONER | DEAN COX, COMMISSIONER

July 11, 2018

The Honorable John Barrasso, M.D.  
Chairman  
United States Senate Committee on Environment  
and Public Works  
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Draft Legislation to Strengthen the Endangered Species Act

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

Washington County, Utah supports your efforts to modernize the Endangered Species Act (ESA) through drafting the Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018.

We are especially pleased to see that your draft bill would require, for the first time, that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) engage in meaningful consultation with state and local governments in developing and following through with recovery goals designed to lead to delisting. As a county, we naturally support provisions of the draft legislation to ensure greater and more proactive consultation with state and local governments in the development of recovery goals. Here in Washington County, we have been managing a habitat conservation plan (HCP) to recover the threatened Mojave Desert Tortoise for over 20 years. Our county is the only county in the state with a desert tortoise population, so county involvement has been vital balancing protection of the species with the need for economic growth. We have plenty of on-the-ground experience with how much more effective USFWS can be when acting in strong partnership with local government. We speak from experience when we say that county governments should have an active role in threatened and endangered species recovery efforts, including the development and measurement of population recovery goals.

Washington County also supports provisions in the draft legislation that would expand participation of state and local governments in efforts to ensure transparency in the development and use of scientific data during the listing and recovery processes. Utah's counties know that listing and delisting decisions should be based on the best available

scientific data and a transparent decision-making process that follows consistent, reliable timelines. We are also pleased to see that the draft legislation includes the development of candidate conservation agreements to be credited by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service when making a listing determination. Utah's counties have seen firsthand that collaborative agreements between the federal government, state and local officials, landowners and other stakeholders can create species conservation plans that balance community and economic needs with environmental protection. Without local government partnerships, federal management of threatened and endangered species is limited by federal budgets and federal expertise.

All of Utah's counties, including Washington County, have already written individual county resource management plans to coordinate management actions with federal agencies. The state of Utah has used those plans to create a state resource management plan. These plans provide the federal government with existing, verifiable data and scientific information that can be incorporated into federal agency plans, further reducing timelines and ensuring data consistency. We appreciate that the draft legislation recognizes the unique and constructive role counties already play in the development of data and science and the need for the federal government to include state and local governing partners in developing the best possible species conservation policies. The State of Utah and the counties need to be considered full partners in any species plans and decisions. We applaud your effort to codify that into law with this revision of the ESA.

We urge you to continue your dialogue with state and county governments as you craft the best possible ESA modernization package. Thank you for your continued support for counties on this and other issues affecting local governments.

Sincerely,

WASHINGTON COUNTY COMMISSION



Victor Iverson  
Commissioner



Zachary D. Renstrom  
Chairman



Dean Cox  
Commissioner