

# MOHAVE COUNTY BOARD of SUPERVISORS

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2001 College Drive, Suite 90  
Lake Havasu City, AZ 86403  
[johnsbd@frontiernet.net](mailto:johnsbd@frontiernet.net)

Telephone (928) 453-0724  
Fax (928) 453-0717  
1-888-735-3711



## **BUSTER D. JOHNSON** SUPERVISOR DISTRICT 3

July 6, 2018

Honorable John Barrasso  
Chairman  
Committee on Environment and Public Works  
U.S. Senate  
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

I am writing this letter in support of the Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018 discussion draft. As the District III Supervisor for Mohave County, Arizona, and Chairman of the Quadstate Local Government Authority, I feel that rural counties in southwestern Arizona, Nevada, Utah and California will drastically benefit from this discussion draft. I have been a County Supervisor for over twenty years and Chairman of Quadstate for ten. While I feel that the protection of our most endangered species in this Country is crucial, amendments and revisions to the Endangered Species Act have been a long time coming. Overall, this discussion draft is a positive step and should move ahead.

While the Act has always had language that required State and local government involvement, there have been many incidents in which those promises of collaboration have fallen through. It is vitally important that we ensure that state and local governments have a voice at the table when it comes to species listing, delisting and species recovery. The emphasis on greater State involvement in this draft is a positive step in that states often have more detailed information of conditions and population status than do the federal wildlife and land management agencies. If nothing else, the explicit input will provide broader confirmation on conditions, or better identify gaps where adequate data does not exist.

An example of inadequate data can be seen in the Hualapai Mexican Vole that was delisted last year. It was first listed as an endangered species in 1987. Since then, it has been more difficult for Mohave County Officials to go forward with economic development on our vast public lands. Mohave County is made up of roughly 82% of public lands making economic growth very limited on private property. One developer in Mohave County had its entire project shut down indefinitely because the developer was not allowed to grade an existing roadway due to fear of disturbing this special field mouse. Back in 1987, the Service believed the Vole was confined mainly to the Hualapai Mountain area in Kingman. New scientific research has shown this to be untrue, and has revealed that they are a lot more wide spread across the state than originally

thought. I firmly believe had state and local government been more involved in the recovery of this species from the onset, it wouldn't have taken thirty years to properly delist the Vole.

I applaud your emphasis on several key aspects of this proposal and specifically on using the totality of the best scientific knowledge available. The Quadstate Local Government Authority encompasses over 50,000 square miles in the Southwest. The Authority has been heavily involved in the recovery of the Mojave and Sonoran Desert Tortoises. We have always pushed on the emphasis that the federal government needs to focus on the real issues related to the endangerment of these species such as disease and predation and stop the restrictive policies and programs that continue to fail. In over thirty years, we have spent well beyond \$100 million on the recovery of the Desert Tortoise yet have no evidence to show that we have saved a single one.

By including states and local governments in the recovery process, I strongly believe that we can finally focus on recovery. Frequently, policies and plans are put into place by leaders and individuals well over two thousand miles away in Washington D.C., when they should be made by those locally on the ground and those who interact with these species on a daily basis. I feel this draft discussion is a step in that direction, so we can finally help these species recover and not simply put them on some list.

I fully support the inclusion of recovery goals and habitat objectives in the listing regulation. This will assure full-disclosure upon promulgation, and provide the public with details of the expected effects of a listing decision upon which it, and affected governments can comment prior to Secretarial decision-making. I also fully concur in the language on county notification appearing on page 12, lines 33 and 34.

The provision for state preparation of recovery plans is a positive approach for spreading workload and delegating workload. I do believe, however, that there needs to be explicit language to assure that a state team and plan formally include representation and direct input from affected local governmental units, including counties.

I applaud your emphasis on the key aspects of the proposed amendments in providing states with more time. Often, species are listed not because they are endangered, but because of court cases. Environmental groups are suing to have these species listed and the Service is given unrealistic time frames to determine if they are truly endangered. By giving states more time, I am hopeful that this problem will eliminate itself. Listing a species that is not truly endangered can be very burdensome on local government and economic development opportunity.

I again want to applaud the work you have done on this draft discussion, and I also want to thank the Western Governors Association for all of its help in drafting this. Overall, the language on performance, conservation agreements, best science, and transparency appear to be fully acceptable, and some such as a formal consideration as to whether the listing would do any good (page 34, line 1), demonstrates the positive degree to which the authors have thought out the draft.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BDJ". The letters are stylized and connected, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Buster D. Johnson  
Mohave County Supervisor  
District III