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July 12, 2018

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

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

On behalf of the Klamath County Chamber of Commerce, I write in support of the proposed "Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018." This discussion draft bill would amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) to increase transparency, increase regulatory certainty, and to reauthorize that Act. We appreciate the leadership of Chairman Barrasso and members of the committee on the issue of ESA reform, and strongly support this very important legislation.

The Klamath County Chamber of Commerce represents 470 business and organizations in Klamath County. Started in 1905, our Chamber is the oldest active business advocate in the community. Our mission is to advance the economic vitality and quality of life in our region. That being said, two of our largest industries (agriculture and timber) have been affected by the ESA legislation and we believe it is time to review the Act and modernize it as necessary to both protect the animals and a community's economic, sociological, and environmental well-being.

The original intent of the ESA - stated in the Act itself - was to encourage "the States and other interested parties, through Federal financial assistance and a system of incentives, to develop and maintain conservation programs which meet national and international standards". The authors of the ESA clearly believed in applying it in a way that would foster collaboration and efficiency of program delivery, in an incentive-driven manner. Unfortunately, implementation of the ESA has "progressed" in recent years towards an approach that is now driven by litigation and sometimes inappropriate interpretation by federal agencies. Rural communities in areas represented by our organization have, in particular, suffered as a result.

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"The Klamath County Chamber of Commerce is committed to Klamath County by advancing its economic vitality and quality of life through the education, promotion and networking of our members"

We are pleased to see the Committee re-assess the original intent of the ESA, which emphasized a paradigm where species conservation could be achieved in cooperation with state and local interests, including farmers and ranchers, instead of at the expense of agriculture, which is happening in several Western states under current interpretation of the Act.

Wyoming Governor Matt Mead, as Chairman of the Western Governors' Association (WGA), launched the Species Conservation and Endangered Species Act Initiative (Initiative) in June 2015. Since then, the entire process has been transparent and constructive. A series of Initiative workshops and webinars, along with a series of questionnaires, have enabled states to share best practices in species management, promote the role of states in species conservation, and explore options for improving the efficacy of the ESA. Workshops and webinars were designed to foster an inclusive and bipartisan dialogue on how to improve implementation of the ESA and better incentivize species conservation efforts to avoid the need to list a species in the first place.

Each of these ideas and others are reflected in the proposed bill. We strongly support the improved state-federal consultation provision relating to conservation and recovery of wildlife included in the draft. The bill also encourages conservation activities through regulatory certainty. Title II also contains important provisions that will improve application of conservation agreements, candidate conservation agreements with assurances, and safe harbor agreements.

Finally, the proposed bill also includes practical improvements to the ESA that will strengthen conservation decision-making through increased transparency, optimize conservation through resource prioritization, and authorize studies that will improve transparency of management decisions and ultimately, improve conservation. For all of these reasons, the Klamath County Chamber of Commerce strongly supports the draft "Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018" and look forward to working with you further to advance this important legislation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 541-884-5193 if you have further questions.

Sincerely,



Heather Tramp
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