



Western Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors Office of the Executive Director

July 11, 2018

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

Dear Senator Barrasso:

On behalf of the Western Region Deans, Directors and stakeholders of the Western Region Land Grant University (LGU) Colleges of Agriculture, I am pleased to write a letter of support for The Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018 as shared with Dr. John Tanaka from the University of Wyoming on June 7, 2018.

When the Western Extension Directors Association (WEDA) and the Western Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors (WAAESD) jointly published the *Western Perspective, Western Agenda Report* (<http://www.waaesd.org/the-western-agenda>) in 2015, the first project undertaken was species conservation. Western Region land-grant university scientists and Extension educators became involved in the Western Governors Association (WGA) Initiative on the Conservation of Species and the Endangered Species Act started by Governor Matt Mead and met separately to develop recommendations for using science-based solutions to conserve threatened and endangered species.

On behalf of the WAAESD, Dr. Tanaka participated in nearly all of the WGA initiative forums and workgroup meetings over the past three years. Through that process, he had the opportunity to both share the research perspective and to learn different stakeholders' views. The collaborative forum process resulted in a series of sound recommendations presented to the Western Governors Association (WGA) for consideration. Many of those recommendations contributed significantly to the resolutions adopted by WGA and many of the proposed amendments appear to follow the WGA recommendations.

As Governor Mead stated in the kick off the WGA initiative, this is not an attempt to scrap the ESA, but to make it work better. Establishing clear criteria for recovery of a threatened or endangered species is critical. Delisting a species when it has met those criteria is equally critical for local landowners, communities, and the state. Better involvement of the States and Tribal Governments throughout the process was an overarching theme throughout the WGA workgroups. Indeed, the following sections make significant improvements to the Act

- Use the “best scientific and commercial data” (Title I, Sec. 102) and (Title III, Sec. 301). These changes far exceed using only the best available data standard currently in place.
- Transparency of information (Title III, Sec. 302) is increasingly important in the scientific community. Protections as outlined in this section important to safeguard those providing such information and allowing state laws to be followed while ensuring such data can be made available.

- Voluntary conservation efforts and regulatory assurances, Title II, Secs. 201 to 205
- Prioritizing listing petitions, reviews, and determinations (Title IV, Sec. 401)
- Inclusion of qualified scientists on the recovery teams (Title I, Sec. 102).

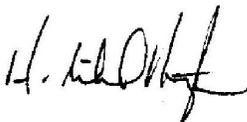
LGU scientists can add research results, contribute to data interpretation, and bring relevant field experiences and knowledge of the species and ecosystem to the table. Scientists with both habitat and species-specific experience should be included. If these scientists are to be full voting members of the recovery team, there should be a qualifier in the section similar to the one where Federal representatives cannot exceed the number of State and local representatives. However, we caution against having scientists as voting members of these committees. We believe that scientists participating in a technical advisory capacity would best serve committees. Finally, LGUs are a valuable source of scientists from Agricultural Experiment Stations and educators from Cooperative Extension who should be among the go-to experts during ESA decisions.

The WGA workgroups also had significant discussion on whether economic and social considerations should be included in listing or delisting decisions. These factors are not in the proposed amendments; however, many of stakeholders thought these were important considerations.

The WAAESD, the Western LGU Deans of Agriculture, Western Council of Agriculture Research, Extension and Teaching, and the Western Extension Directors Association support efforts that bolster the scientific integrity that is the foundation of the Endangered Species Act, expand collaboration between states and the USFWS, and protect the privacy of stakeholders engaged in the recovery process. Further, we support the recommendations that resulted from the collaborative process sponsored by the WGA.

If you have questions please do not hesitate to contact Dr. John Tanaka at jtanaka@uwyo.edu or the WAAESD at Michael.Harrington@colostate.edu.

Sincerely,



H Michael Harrington
Executive Director