

Tackling the Extinction Crisis

Increasing Appropriations to the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to Save Endangered Wildlife

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service provide habitat for hundreds of plants and animals listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Successful recovery efforts demonstrate that dedicated effort and sufficient resources can reverse the extinction trajectory. While the number of threatened and endangered species on lands these agencies administer keeps increasing, funding for recovery efforts declines in real terms. BLM and the Forest Service simply do not receive sufficient funding to conduct and lead the necessary habitat and species restoration work to make meaningful progress towards species recovery.

BLM and the Forest Service are required by the ESA and their own laws and policies to promote the recovery of listed species. These agencies administer about 19% of the total U.S. land base. Several hundred listed species occur on lands they manage. Legal mandates to balance uses often complicate efforts to conserve species and habitat. Yet, maintaining biodiversity and functioning ecosystems is essential for our own wellbeing, and habitat restoration work creates jobs.

The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) administer the ESA, and BLM and the Forest Service help implement it by taking actions outlined in species recovery plans to benefit listed species. It is a common misconception that FWS and NMFS fund all this work; much of it comes from the federal lands and state agency budgets with some contributed by non-governmental partners. BLM and the Forest Service can afford to conduct only a mere fraction of the recovery actions necessary for the species in their care.

Investing in threatened and endangered species recovery can lead to delisting species. For example, BLM fenced off Borax Lake chub habitat from grazing and unauthorized off-road vehicle use and purchased land inholdings, after which FWS determined the species was recovered and removed federal protection in 2020. The Forest Service revived and created habitat for the endangered Kirtland's warbler by changing timber harvesting practices and employing prescribed burning to restore fire, conducting population surveys and developing education programs. Four decades after being listed, the Kirtland's warbler population had increased by over 1,400% and was taken off the endangered list in 2019.

Ramping up appropriations and employing good government practices for threatened and endangered species are achievable actions to protect America's natural heritage. Enabling these agencies to succeed at this important and legally required role necessitates resources. We recommend:

1. Funding BLM and the Forest Service at levels that ensure the agencies can carry out their statutory obligations to help recover threatened and endangered species;
2. Establishing and maintaining budget lines for the BLM and Forest Service threatened and endangered species programs; and,
3. Strengthening reporting mechanisms to demonstrate the connection between investment and recovery outcomes.

