

UNDERMINING PROTECTIONS AND FUNDING FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES

Passed: 213-203

SUMMARY:

The House passed an appropriations bill with 15 provisions undermining the Endangered Species Act and other environmental protections, and cutting funding for endangered species and national wildlife refuges, as well as public lands, clean water, clean air, climate change, and other vital environmental programs. (*November 3, 2023, Roll Call No. 597*)

BACKGROUND:

Federal funding for environmental programs is vital to protect our irreplaceable national heritage and to leave a clean, healthy, and vibrant environment for our children. Efforts by federal agencies to conserve imperiled species, stop illegal wildlife trafficking, effectively manage our public lands, build ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change, and keep our air and water clean all depend on adequate funding of their programs. Despite their importance, in recent years programs that protect our environment and natural resources have been severely underfunded. Must-pass funding bills have also become a vehicle for riders – controversial policy provisions undermining environmental protections that proponents hope will ride along the underlying bill.

The FY 2024 Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Act (H.R. 4821) would gut funding to the agencies that protect our environment and public health, including slashing U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's flagship Endangered Species Program to \$26M below current levels, cutting the chronically underfunded National Wildlife Refuge System's funding by \$54M below current levels despite increased annual visitation, and reducing the Environmental Protection Agency's budget by 40%.

In addition to drastic funding cuts, the bill includes anti-wildlife riders that undermine the ESA and protections for imperiled species like the sage-grouse, grizzly bear, gray wolf, northern long-eared bat, and dunes sagebrush lizard. Other poison pill riders in the bill include prohibiting funding for implementing the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's vessel speed rule intended to protect the critically endangered North Atlantic Right Whale; prohibiting funding for the Bureau of Ocean Energy and Management and the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement to implement an agreement protecting Rice's whale and its habitat from fossil fuel projects; and preventing U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from finalizing proposed Endangered Species Act rules for multiple species, including the Texas kangaroo rat, Salina mucket, and Mexican fawnsfoot mussels.

OUTCOME:

On November 3, 2023, the House passed H.R. 4821, 213-203. "Nay" was the pro-conservation vote. The Senate has not yet voted on the bill.