Protect the Endangered Species Act:

Share your opposition to a permitting reform bill that would gut the ESA!

Table of Contents

I. Overview....1

II. How to use this toolkit....2

III. Factsheet and Talking points....2

IV. Take Action – Send an email to your Senators....3

V. Take Action – Call your Senators....4

VI. Take Action – Submit a letter to the editor (LTE)....4

Tips for writing and submitting LTEs....4

Sample Letter to the Editor....5

Sample Letter to the Editor: Rhode Island....6

Sample Letter to the Editor: New Mexico....6

I. Overview

In the remaining months of the 119th Congress, the Senate is poised to vote on one of the worst attacks we've seen on threatened and endangered wildlife, the Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act of 2026 (S. 5653). If passed, this bill would make vast and dangerous changes to the Endangered Species Act, our country's strongest tool for preventing extinction. Among the concerns, the bill would condense, and in some cases eliminate, vital endangered species reviews or shift those reviews from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to states, which don't have the resources or mission to protect endangered species from harm.

We agree that America needs affordable energy, a modern electric grid, more housing and infrastructure capable of meeting the demands of a growing economy. However, we do not need to, nor should we sacrifice, our country's wildlife and natural heritage to do so. There is clear evidence that the ESA is not the obstacle to development that opponents claim it is. And S. 5653 would weaken fundamental wildlife protections without addressing the problems that actually slow development.

Congress should be protecting our cherished wildlife, not gutting vital conservation laws, like the ESA, in the name of infrastructure development. We can build the future America needs without dismantling our commitment to the wildlife and natural heritage we share.

II. How to use this toolkit

We expect this bill to come to the Senate floor for its first procedural vote on November 9, the week after the November 3 elections. Before November 9, we encourage you to use this toolkit to contact your Senators and tell them to VOTE NO on S. 5653.

There are a range of actions you can take, and we encourage you to choose the actions that are best suited for you. Each action makes a difference and every call, email or letter to the editor will help to raise opposition to S. 5653.

Below you'll find a sample call script, email and letter to the editor template. You are free to use your own words to personalize these messages and share why you care about safeguarding endangered wildlife and the vital conservation laws established to protect them.

If you have any questions, need additional resources, or would like someone to review your communications, please reach out to Caitlin Cattelino, Defenders' Director of National Outreach, at ccattelino@defenders.org.

III. Factsheet and Talking points

This factsheet provides a helpful overview of our main concerns with the ESA provisions in S. 5653. You can use these talking points, and the ones listed below, to strengthen and personalize your message of opposition. Feel free to select 1-3 bullet points that resonate with you and include them in your email or letter to the editor.

Top-line talking points

- We can build more without sacrificing America's wildlife. We need affordable energy, housing and modern infrastructure, but not at the expense of the wildlife and natural heritage we share.
- The Endangered Species Act is not America's permitting problem. The Senate bill would weaken fundamental wildlife protections without addressing the problems that actually slow development.
- We should be fixing what is broken, not dismantling what works. The ESA has helped prevent the extinction of more than 99% of the species listed under its protection.

- There is a better way forward. We can improve agency coordination, eliminate unnecessary duplication and give federal agencies the resources they need to make timely decisions without sacrificing wildlife.

The ESA is not preventing America from building needed infrastructure.

- The ESA is not the permitting obstacle its opponents claim it is. Decades of experience show that development and wildlife conservation can coexist.
- Consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists on endangered species impacts helps projects move forward responsibly. It allows wildlife experts and project proponents to identify potential harm, modify projects and reduce impacts before construction begins.
- A peer-reviewed study of 88,290 consultations found that not a single project was stopped or extensively altered because of a finding that it would seriously threaten a protected species or its habitat.
- Most wildlife reviews are completed quickly. Informal consultations typically take about two weeks, while formal reviews take approximately two months.

What the permitting legislation would mean for wildlife

- Federal protections could become a patchwork. The bill would allow states to assume responsibility for federal wildlife reviews, leaving endangered species with different safeguards depending on where a project is located.
- Wildlife does not recognize state lines. A species that occupies or migrates across several states needs protections that account for its survival across its entire range. State-by-state decisions, and state-based biologists, could overlook the broader consequences for wildlife.
- Scientific safeguards would be weakened. The legislation would change the standards governing how federal agencies evaluate scientific information, making it harder to account for threats to imperiled species.
- Some projects would bypass wildlife review altogether. Certain highway and water-related permits would be exempted from consultation requirements, even when protected species could be affected.

IV. Take Action – Send an email to your Senators

We've made it really easy for you to send a message to your Senators. Click here to see our sample email. If you can, take a moment to change the subject line and add your own thoughts at the beginning of the message. A personalized communication that expresses your connection to an issue can make a much greater impression.

Alternatively, you can send a personalized message through your Senators' email pages on their websites. To find your Senators' webpages, click here and enter your address. Then, click on the "contact" link to be directed to each Senator's email page.

V. Take Action – Call your Senators

Calling your Senators is an effective way to share your opposition to S. 5653. For many congressional offices, even a small number of calls can elevate the importance of an issue. Below is a call script you can use. Feel free to personalize it to better reflect your voice and your concerns.

To find your Senators' phone numbers, click here and enter your address.

> Hello, my name is _____ and I'm a constituent from *[CITY, ZIP CODE]*. I'm calling to urge you to strongly oppose S. 5653, the permitting reform bill, due to the extreme provisions in the bill that would gut the Endangered Species Act. If passed, this bill would allow states to review the impacts of federal actions on endangered wildlife instead of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has specialized knowledge and decades of experience protecting endangered species. Beloved animals, including whales, sea turtles and lynx, could have different protections based on which state they live.
>
> Again, I urge you to protect our imperiled wildlife and the ESA by opposing S. 5653. Thank you for your time.

VI. Take Action – Submit a letter to the editor (LTE)

Tips for writing and submitting LTEs

Using local media is one of the best ways to elevate issues that matter to you, like defending the ESA. Below are tips for writing and submitting your LTE, along with a sample letter that you can personalize.

- USE YOUR OWN WORDS. Don't simply cut and paste from sample talking points or LTE templates. Many papers won't print letters if they suspect they are part of a letter campaign.
- Include something about who you are and why you care: *"I am [mother, outdoors person, hunter, angler, teacher, business owner, scientist, religious leader, etc.] and I care about protecting endangered species because…"*
- LTEs tend to be short and concise. If the newspaper does not specify a word limit, aim for approximately 200-250 words.

- End your LTE with a strong call-to-action that will motivate readers to take the next step.
- Do not attach your LTE to an email. Copy and paste your letter into the body of the email and write “Letter to the Editor” in the subject line.
- Please include your name, address, city, state and phone number for verification purposes. The newspapers will not print your personal contact information.
- Proofread your letter. A letter with several spelling and grammar errors is unlikely to be published.
- Avoid submitting the same LTE to multiple papers at one time.
- If you haven’t heard from the newspaper or seen your LTE published five days after you submitted it, send one polite follow-up email to check on the status of your LTE.
- We're here to help! Defenders is happy to review your letter before you submit it. You can email your LTE to Caitlin (ccattelino@defenders.org) for feedback.

Sample Letter to the Editor (approximate word count: 200)

If you live in Rhode Island or New Mexico, please see a specific sample LTE for your state below!

Please personalize the letter below to better reflect your voice and wildlife in your community. Even adding a sentence or two that describes why you care about defending the ESA will make a difference!

Dear Editor,

As a [RECREATIONALIST, WILDLIFE ENTHUSIAST, TEACHER, HIKER, HUNTER, ANGLER, FISHER], I'm concerned about the future of wildlife in [STATE]. Congress is considering the Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act of 2026, which would eviscerate provisions of the Endangered Species Act under the pretense that wildlife is standing in the way of faster development. With the ESA under repeated attack by this Congress and administration, I worry that future generations may lose the benefits nature provides and the beauty of wildlife and wild places.

Does America need better infrastructure? Sure. Do endangered species prevent that from happening? Absolutely not. Endangered species reviews are already fast, and for over 50 years, the ESA has been guided by the best available science and prevented 99% of listed species from extinction. We can build what our communities need without undermining science or putting species like the [STATE SPECIES] or the [STATE SPECIES] at risk.

I urge Senators [LAST NAME] and [LAST NAME] to do what's right and vote NO on this bill. I also encourage my fellow [DENONYMs] to call our senators and ask them

to protect wildlife. The ESA works, is supported by 84% of the public and is efficient. There's a better path forward that doesn't throw it away.

Regards,
[FULL NAME, CITY, STATE]

Sample Letter to the Editor: Rhode Island *(approximate word count: 200)*

Dear Editor,

As a [RECREATIONALIST, WILDLIFE ENTHUSIAST, TEACHER, HIKER, HUNTER, ANGLER, PARENT, STUDENT, etc], I'm concerned about the future of wildlife in Rhode Island. Congress is considering the **Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act of 2026**, which would eviscerate provisions of the Endangered Species Act under the pretense that wildlife is standing in the way of faster development. With the ESA under repeated attack by this Congress and administration, I worry that future generations may lose the benefits nature provides and the beauty of wildlife and wild places.

Does America need better infrastructure? Sure. Do endangered species prevent that from happening? Absolutely not. Endangered species reviews are already fast, and for over 50 years, the ESA has been guided by the best available science and prevented 99% of listed species from extinction. We can build what our communities need without undermining science or putting species like the [STATE SPECIES] or the [STATE SPECIES] at risk.

I urge Senator Whitehouse to remove the ESA provisions from the permitting legislation. I also encourage my fellow Rhode Islanders to urge Senator Whitehouse to protect wildlife. The ESA works, is supported by 84% of the public and is efficient. There's a better path forward that doesn't throw it away.

Regards,
[FULL NAME, CITY, STATE]

Sample Letter to the Editor: New Mexico *(approximate word count: 190)*

Dear Editor,

As a [RECREATIONALIST, WILDLIFE ENTHUSIAST, TEACHER, HIKER, HUNTER, ANGLER, PARENT, STUDENT, etc], I'm concerned about the future of wildlife in Rhode Island. Congress is considering the **Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act of 2026**, which would eviscerate provisions of the Endangered Species Act

under the pretense that wildlife is standing in the way of faster development. With the ESA under repeated attack by this Congress and administration, I worry that future generations may lose the benefits nature provides and the beauty of wildlife and wild places.

Does America need better infrastructure? Sure. Do endangered species prevent that from happening? Absolutely not. Endangered species reviews are already fast, and for over 50 years, the ESA has been guided by the best available science and prevented 99% of listed species from extinction. We can build what our communities need without undermining science or putting species like the [STATE SPECIES] or the [STATE SPECIES] at risk.

I urge the Senate to do what's right and vote NO on this bill. The ESA works, is supported by 84% of the public and is efficient. There's a better path forward that doesn't throw it away.

Regards,
[FULL NAME, CITY, STATE]