

**Alaska Wilderness league * Animal Welfare Institute * Born Free USA
Center for Biological Diversity * Defenders of Wildlife * Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition * Environmental Protection Information Center
Howling for Wolves * Humane Society Legislative Fund
International Fund for Animal Welfare
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute * Klamath Forest Alliance
League of Conservation Voters * Natural Resources Defense Council * Sierra Club
Turtle Island Restoration Network * Western Watersheds Project * Wildlands Network
Wolf Conservation Center * Wyoming Untrapped**

July 18, 2017

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the twenty-one undersigned organizations and our millions of members and supporters, we write to express our strong opposition to the inappropriately named “Hunting Heritage and Environmental Legacy Preservation (HELP) for Wildlife Act,” S. 1514. We urge you to not cosponsor this harmful bill and to vote against it in committee. While the bill contains reauthorization language for Chesapeake Bay-focused programs and some other programs supported by many of our organizations, it also contains three damaging provisions that would harm wildlife and undermine our nation’s most important wildlife conservation law – the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The program reauthorizations contained in this bill do not outweigh the damage caused by the bill’s poison pill riders. For this reason, we urge you to oppose S. 1514.

Wyoming and Great Lakes Wolf Delisting Riders

The so-called “HELP for Wildlife Act” includes two “War on Wolves” riders that ensure that gray wolves will not receive protections under the ESA in Wyoming or the Great Lakes region. Section 7 of the bill overrides a federal district court decision and removes existing Endangered Species Act protections for gray wolves in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. A decision from the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals in the Great Lakes case is anticipated any day now, making the Great Lakes provision very poorly timed. Section 8 codifies a recent D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals decision that stripped ESA protections for wolves in Wyoming. The plaintiffs in the Wyoming case did not appeal the court’s decision and wolves in Wyoming were already returned to state management in late April. Thus, the Wyoming portion of this rider is effectively moot.

More fundamentally, these riders politically subvert the ESA’s process – not to mention the rule of law and citizens’ access to court – by prohibiting judicial review of both legislative wolf delistings. Congress long ago recognized that the federal government needs citizens to be partners in enforcing all manner of America’s laws, including civil-rights laws, voting-rights laws, environmental laws. The “no judicial review” language in this rider sets a damaging precedent for undermining all laws that allow citizens from across the political spectrum to go to court to hold the government accountable for its actions.

These riders also continue a dangerous trend of congressional interference in listing and delisting decisions that should be made by the federal wildlife agencies and adjudicated in court if necessary.

These riders are an attempt to solve politically what should be done by science and the processes set out under the ESA. Moreover, these riders encourage other insidious legislative attacks on the ESA, an incredibly popular, successful law that has saved more than 99 percent of protected species from going extinct.

Lead Fishing Tackle Rider

The bill also prohibits the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from regulating toxic lead fishing tackle, which unnecessarily harms fish, wildlife, and human health. In the United States, an estimated 4,000 tons of lead are lost in ponds and streams as fishing lures and sinkers every year, leading to the death of thousands of birds, aquatic species and other animals from lead poisoning. Lead fishing equipment also risks contamination of our waterways and drinking water. Despite the well-documented dangers of toxic lead poisoning and the availability of inexpensive and ecologically sound alternatives to lead fishing gear, Section 9 prevents the EPA from regulating lead in nearly all forms of fishing tackle under the Toxic Substances Control Act.

The poorly named “HELP for Wildlife Act” would harm rather than help wildlife. Waterfowl and other species that ingest lead fishing tackle would suffer; gray wolves in Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming would be subject to state management without the chance for federal judicial review; and other imperiled species that rely on the protections of the ESA would become more vulnerable to future legislative attacks. A deal that trades poison pill riders such as these for reauthorizations of programs is a bad deal that harms wildlife, public health, and the ESA and does not deserve the support of any pro-conservation Members of Congress. We strongly urge you to oppose this bill and to vote against it. Thank you for your attention.

Alaska Wilderness League
Animal Welfare Institute
Born Free USA
Center for Biological Diversity
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Protection Information Center
Howling for Wolves
Humane Society Legislative Fund
International Fund for Animal Welfare
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Klamath Forest Alliance
League of Conservation Voters
Natural Resources Defense Council
Sierra Club
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Western Watersheds Project
Wildlands Network
Wolf Conservation Center
Wyoming Untrapped