



The Endangered Species Act

MORE THAN 40 YEARS OF SUCCESS

BACK FROM THE BRINK IN THE SOUTHWEST

For more than 40 years, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has helped prevent the extinction of our national treasures. Because of the act, iconic species such as the bald eagle, peregrine falcon and American alligator are thriving once again. Hundreds of other species, including the manatee, Mexican gray wolf, black-footed ferret, California condor and whooping crane, are no longer on the brink of extinction. Such astonishing success makes the act a true symbol of our nation's commitment to protecting our natural heritage for future generations. It is also an example of the progress that can be made when we collaborate to conserve our local wildlife and habitat. With the participation of communities, businesses, conservationists, tribes and government agencies, we can preserve wildlife and still have a vibrant economy. But the biggest success is that all parties—both people and our most vulnerable creatures—have benefited from the ESA. Working together, we have saved hundreds of plants and animals for generations to come.

Aplomado Falcon

The Aplomado falcon, a midsize, slate-gray bird of prey, is common throughout much of Latin America from Mexico to the tip of Argentina. Historically, the falcon's northern range extended into large parts of west Texas and southern New Mexico. But the U.S. population declined sharply in the early 1900s as a result of fire suppression, overgrazing and agriculture that altered native desert grasslands. By the late 1950s, habitat loss and poisoning from harmful pesticides like DDT had completely wiped out Aplomado falcons in the Southwest.

Fortunately, Aplomado falcons were given protection under the ESA in 1986 and recovery plans were set in motion soon thereafter. More than 1,000 captive-bred falcons have since been released in the wild, and hundreds of chicks have been successfully reared. The key to success has been lasting partnerships with west Texas ranchers and the U.S. military in New Mexico, conserving the species on both public and private lands. These partners have entered into flexible agreements to secure habitat for Aplomado falcons while allowing activities such as running cattle or testing missiles to continue without additional restrictions.ⁱ



COURTESY NASA



COURTESY U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Apache Trout

When it was placed on the endangered species list in 1967, the Apache trout was near extinction. As part of the recovery plan, the Alchey-Williams Creek National Fish Hatchery has produced several million Apache trout since 1983.

Thanks to the release of hatchery-bred fish in the wild, the building of barriers to deter invasive fish species, and the restoration of riverside vegetation called for in the recovery plan, there are now almost 30 self-sustaining populations of Apache trout, and the species is almost fully recovered.ⁱⁱ



COURTESY JIM RORABAUGH/U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

The southwestern willow flycatcher is a small, migratory songbird that lives in dense vegetation near slow-moving or still waterways where it forages for insects and builds its nests. But decades of over-grazing by cattle and poor water management in the Southwest destroyed much of the riparian habitat that the species historically depended on for survival. As a result, when the flycatcher was listed as an endangered species in 1995, there were only an estimated 359 known nesting sites left, primarily in Arizona and New Mexico.^v

Fortunately, listing the flycatcher under the ESA set in motion a number of recovery actions, ranging from the reduction in predation of flycatchers to the restoration of important riparian areas. By 2013, the number of breeding pairs had increased to an estimated 900 to 1,000.^{vi} In addition, a total area of 208,973 square acres (encompassing 1,227 miles of streams) has been designated as critical habitat for the species.^{vii} Protecting these sensitive riparian areas and restoring natural water cycles has allowed vegetation to recover, giving flycatchers a chance to thrive once again. In turn, these positive changes will benefit people by reducing erosion, enhancing water quality and storage, and keeping insect populations in check.



COURTESY U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Whooping Crane

First listed under an earlier version of the ESA in 1967, whooping cranes in the United States have increased in number from a low of 15 in 1941 to 599 in 2011.ⁱⁱⁱ As settlers drained the marshes and wetlands, large portions of the crane's breeding and wintering grounds were altered and destroyed. Another important section of whooping crane wintering habitat was even turned into a bombing range during World War II. This cumulative habitat loss left North America's tallest bird teetering on the edge of extinction.

Fortunately, implementation of an intensive captive-breeding program and the designation of certain lands as critical habitat under the ESA have brought the whooping crane back from the brink. Each year, steadily expanding numbers of whooping cranes are successfully making the long journey from Canada to their winter sanctuary at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas.

Bringing the species back from such extremely low numbers has taken dedication and hard work, and the job is not yet done. Whooping cranes still face threats such as high salinity levels in the Gulf of Mexico, drought in their wintering grounds and the ongoing loss of prairie habitat to development in their Canadian breeding grounds. But as a result of these efforts, the slow but steady recovery of this magnificent bird is one of conservation's most inspiring success stories.^{iv}

ⁱ http://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/aplomado_falcon_fact_sheet.pdf

ⁱⁱ http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/apache_recovery.shtml

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.savingcranes.org/images/stories/site_images/conservation/whooping_crane/pdfs/historic_wc_numbers.pdf

^{iv} <http://www.savingcranes.org/whooping-crane.html>

^v <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-01-03/pdf/2012-30634.pdf>

^{vi} <http://sbsc.wt.usgs.gov/cprs/research/projects/swwf/question.asp>

^{vii} <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-01-03/pdf/2012-30634.pdf>

^{viii} http://www.fws.gov/nevada/protected_species/birds/documents/swwf/1-02-13_SWWF_NR_Final.pdf



1130 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
202.682.9400

To learn more about Defenders' work, visit
www.defenders.org