



# *The Endangered Species Act*

## MORE THAN 40 YEARS OF SUCCESS

### BACK FROM THE BRINK IN THE WEST

**F**or 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.

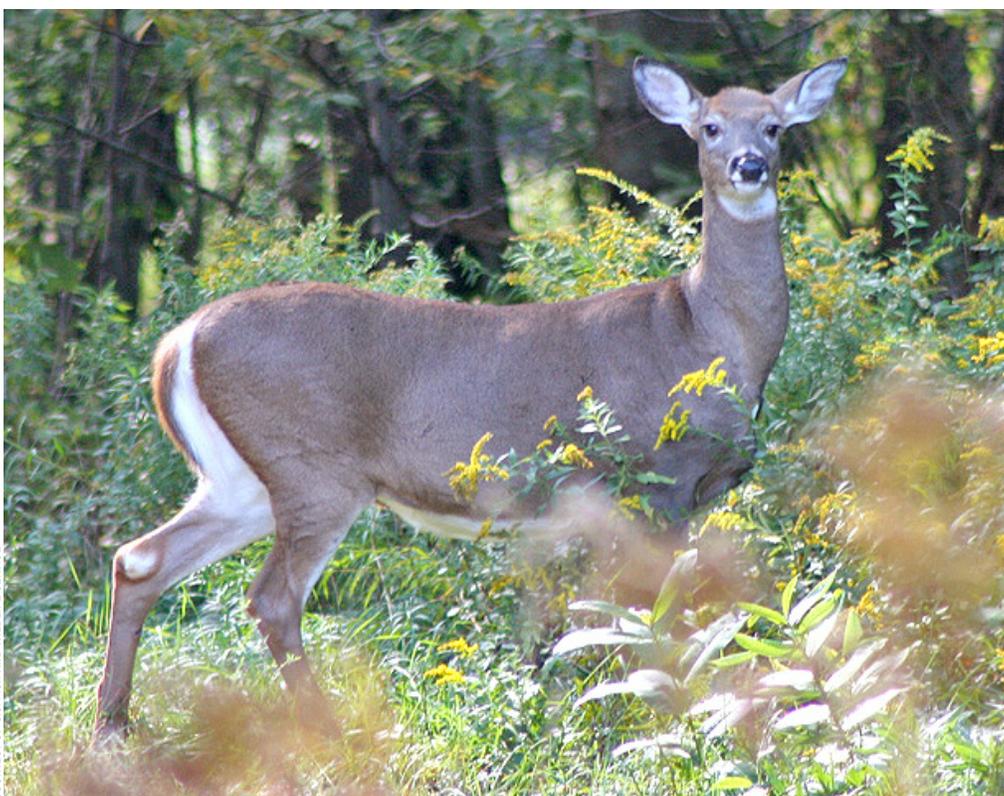
Hundreds of other species, including the manatee, Mexican gray wolf, black-footed ferret, California condor and whooping crane, are no longer on the brink of extinction. Such astonishing success makes the act a true symbol of our nation's commitment to protecting our natural heritage for future generations. 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—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.



COURTESY OF U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

#### **Aleutian Canada Goose**

The Aleutian Canada goose population had dwindled to just a few hundred birds in the mid-1970s, but rebounded spectacularly to more than 100,000 birds during the last decade.<sup>i</sup> This improvement was due to innovative conservation efforts carried out from Alaska, where the geese breed, to California's San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys, where they spend the winter. Working in partnership, landowners, conservation organizations and federal and state agencies protected the geese through waterfowl hunting season adjustments, predator control programs on breeding grounds, and agreements on the management of private lands needed for winter habitat. In 2001, the Aleutian Canada goose was declared fully recovered and removed from the list of threatened and endangered species.



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#### **Columbia Whitetail Deer**

The Columbia whitetail deer, once widespread in Washington and Oregon, had dwindled to fewer than 700 by the 1940s because of excessive hunting and poorly planned development. In response to the deer's listing as endangered, federal, state and local governments joined together to establish and manage reserves, adjust hunting regulations and encourage land use that helped the deer survive. As a result of these conservation efforts, the population of the Columbia whitetail deer is now more than 5,000, and the animal is no longer endangered in parts of Oregon.<sup>ii</sup>



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### Grizzly Bear

Historically, an estimated 50,000 grizzly bears inhabited the lower 48 states between the Pacific Ocean and Great Plains. However, the species was virtually wiped out in the 1800s as western settlers began killing them in large numbers. In 1975, with only a few hundred grizzly bears remaining, the bear was listed as a threatened species under the ESA. Over the last four decades, grizzly bears have slowly recovered. Today, roughly 1,600 grizzly bears remain in five separate populations. In places like Yellowstone and Glacier national parks, grizzly bears are a top attraction for visitors eager to catch a glimpse of these majestic animals in the wild.

As grizzly populations expand into more populated parts of their former range, they face a new threat: more frequent encounters with people. Garbage, livestock, pet food, bird seed, beehives and fruit trees can draw bears into towns and backyards. To prevent the problems that end up with a bear either relocated or euthanized, tribal, state and federal wildlife managers and conservation groups are working with landowners to provide electric fencing, bear-resistant trash containers and other tools to deter bears. These methods have proven effective at reducing or eliminating conflict, protecting property and keeping the grizzly on the path toward long-term recovery.



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### Southern Sea Otter

The southern sea otter's historic range stretched from the Pacific Northwest all the way down the Pacific coast to Baja California. By the early 1900s, fur traders had hunted a population that once numbered approximately 16,000 down to an estimated 50 individuals along the

California coast. The current range in the state is considerably smaller, spanning from Half Moon Bay to just south of Point Conception. In the early 1970s, the population was between 1,250 and 2,300 individuals but declined again from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s due to mortality from entanglement in fishing gear. Listed as a threatened species in 1977, the southern sea otter has slowly begun to rebound. As of 2014, the three-year running population average was approximately 2,944 southern sea otters off the coast of California. In 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) modified its regulations on sea otters to allow the otters to expand naturally throughout their range.

### Gray Wolves in the Northern Rockies

The comeback of the gray wolf in the West is one of the greatest success stories of the ESA. Essentially extirpated by the 1930s, wolves quickly reclaimed a place in the region after wild wolves from Canada were released in Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho.



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As a result of this reintroduction program, carried out under the ESA beginning in 1995, there were more than 1,700 wolves in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming as of the end of 2011.<sup>iii</sup> The return of these top-down predators has helped restore ecological balance in the region. Depleted vegetation in valleys and along riverbanks in Yellowstone National Park has shown increased growth.<sup>iv</sup> Beaver, native trout and songbird populations have also increased since wolf reintroduction, and hungry grizzly bears coming out of hibernation have benefited from the scavenging carcasses left behind by wolves.<sup>v</sup> Overall, the Northern Rockies wolf population has rebounded well under federal protection. FWS removed ESA protections for wolves in Idaho and Montana in 2011. Today, wolves remain imperiled, principally by state management plans that include hostile and aggressive tactics designed to significantly reduce wolf populations, which in turn prevents wolves from reoccupying other states with suitable habitat.

<sup>i</sup> [http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/OGCTF/docs/Current\\_Goose\\_Population\\_Status.pdf](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/OGCTF/docs/Current_Goose_Population_Status.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/Species/Data/ColumbianWhiteTailedDeer/>

<sup>iii</sup> [http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/annual-rpt11/030612\\_FINAL\\_NRM-Background-Summary\\_2011.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/wolf/annual-rpt11/030612_FINAL_NRM-Background-Summary_2011.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=lessons-from-the-wolf&page=3>

<sup>v</sup> Id.



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