



NEWS

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REPORT OUTLINES SUCCESS IN SAVING ENDANGERED SPECIES:
RECOVERY EFFORTS ARE WORKING

America's effort to save endangered species has prevented the extinction of over 99 percent of animals and plants on the Endangered Species List, and nearly 60 percent of species listed the longest are stable or increasing in number, according to a new report to Congress from the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"This report shows that we can save endangered species, but it takes time," said George T. Frampton, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "The Aleutian Canada goose, the Columbian white-tailed deer, the greenback cutthroat trout, and a host of other species are living proof that recovery programs work."

Species listed the longest are showing the greatest signs of recovery, said Mollie Beattie, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Fifty-eight percent of the 106 species listed from 1968-73 are considered "stable or increasing," compared with 22 percent of the 294 species listed from 1989-93. Overall, about one-third of all listed species are known to still be declining and many of these are the most recently listed species for which recovery programs have not had time to work.

Only 7 species listed between 1968 and 1993 have been officially recognized as extinct.

"The fact that more than 99 percent of all our endangered species continue to exist is one of the great successes of the

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endangered species program," Beattie said. "Preventing extinction is our first goal. From there, we can begin to bring these species back to the point where they are no longer endangered."

The ultimate goal of the endangered species program is to "recover" species so that they can sustain themselves in the wild and are numerous enough that they no longer need the protection of the Endangered Species Act. Some species respond to recovery efforts relatively quickly while, for others, recovery is more difficult. How long recovery takes depends on how much a species has declined, how much natural habitat remains, whether the causes of the species' decline are understood and can be controlled easily, how long that species takes to mature and reproduce, and other factors. A September 1 Science magazine article cited a study reporting that the median population sizes of taxa at time of listing as endangered or threatened were only about 1000 individuals for animals and 100 for plants. More than half of listed species are plants.

The current population trend of about 23 percent of listed species is uncertain. As funding permits the Fish and Wildlife Service is conducting surveys to determine the status of species whose current population trend is uncertain.

Beattie said critics of the Endangered Species Act often cite the difficulty and cost of recovering species. "Recovery is like emergency room medicine. It costs more than seeing your regular doctor for preventive care. And it costs more to recover endangered species than it would have cost to prevent their decline in the first place. Nevertheless, I doubt a single American would say that saving the bald eagle wasn't worth the time or money.

"The Fish and Wildlife Service's budget for recovery programs for all 962 listed U.S. species was \$39.7 million in FY 1995. That's about the cost of building one mile of urban highway. Americans spend 40 times more than our recovery budget on popcorn at the movies every year," Beattie said.

Beattie said some inflated estimates of endangered species recovery costs come from adding up estimates contained in recovery plans. "That makes for easy math but seldom reflects the actual cost of species recovery, any more than adding up the cost of every item on a menu would tell you the cost of dining at a restaurant," she said.

Recovery plans can often overestimate the amount of money it will eventually take to carry out recovery actions for an

individual species. For example, the recovery plan is required to identify possible land acquisitions that may be needed to protect a species habitat, but less expensive alternatives -- such as conservation easements -- may later be found that protect habitat without acquisition. Or research breakthroughs for one species may be applicable to other species, lowering recovery costs for those species.

Beattie pointed out that the true benefits of recovery efforts for endangered species cannot be measured only in dollars and cents, because they have broad benefits for human health and the environment. "Many physicians and medical researchers support saving endangered species because they know that wild plants and animals are potential sources for new cancer-fighting drugs and other medical breakthroughs. Habitat saved for endangered species also benefits a wide variety of other fish and wildlife, including both game and nongame species, as well as clean water, outdoor recreation, and other environmental values," Beattie said. "These environmental values go back into our economy. Americans spent \$59 billion on fish and wildlife-associated outdoor recreation in 1991."

Recovery plans are prepared by experts from Federal, state, and private agencies and universities. Each recovery plan details actions needed to bring that species back. A new Clinton Administration policy also provides for affected stakeholders to be included in the development and implementation of recovery plans. The public is invited to comment on draft recovery plans.

Although most recovery plans have been written to cover individual species, some cover multiple species occupying the same habitat, and others have broad benefits for entire ecosystems. For example, recovery of the northern spotted owl is provided for in the President's Forest Plan, which also offers benefits for salmon and a host of other species in the northwest forest ecosystem including the Pacific yew, source of the anti-cancer drug taxol. Recovery efforts for the Louisiana black bear are saving habitat for migratory songbirds and other species.

The report says that of the 893 species covered by the report, 484 (54 percent) had final approved recovery plans as of September 30, 1994, and another 185 (21 percent) had approved draft plans. Of the remaining 224 species without recovery plans, 159 had been listed for less than 3 years but had recovery plans in development. Fourteen species did not need recovery plans.

Ironically, Assistant Secretary Frampton said, some legislation currently pending in the Congress would make recovering

endangered species more difficult, time-consuming, and costly than under the current law, by eliminating important habitat protection for endangered species and reducing the responsibilities Federal agencies now have to protect endangered species. "Some of the proposals now before the Congress would essentially reverse the progress we have made in recovering endangered species," Frampton said.

The report, entitled "1994 Report to Congress: Endangered and Threatened Species Recovery Program" will be available for sale shortly from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. A limited number of advance copies are available for review by accredited news media.