

September 21, 2020

The Honorable John Barrasso Chairman,
Environment and Public Works Committee
United States Senate Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents America's 3,000 conservation districts and the 17,000 men and women who serve on their governing boards. Established under state law, conservation districts share a single mission: to work cooperatively with federal, state and other local resource management agencies and private sector interest groups to provide technical, financial and other assistance to help landowners and operators apply conservation to the landscape at the local level.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication to bring the Endangered Species Act (ESA) into the 21st century. Although ESA is often linked to challenges in the Western U.S., natural resource managers and industry professionals across the country work under outdated ESA requirements/rules/statute. NACD welcomes the updates to the ESA statute included in the *Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2020*.

Land management decisions are best made locally and by the communities impacted by them. Local experts offer unmatched expertise and knowledge. All too often, decisions made in Washington, D.C., even those in good faith, hinder management on the ground and leave a bevy of red tape. Providing states and their residents, including local governments, farmers, ranchers and other landowners, the opportunity to more actively engage on ESA only strengthens on-the-ground management. Conservation districts throughout the country already work with these landowners to deliver locally-led conservation, and these efforts will be supported if they are able to more actively engage in the ESA process to provide this local knowledge.

Expanding funding for voluntary conservation would better relationships between government and landowners. Voluntary and incentive-based conservation practices have worked well for local communities to protect our nation's natural resources for decades. Working with landowners instead of prescribing a regulation helps achieve stronger results, ultimately leading to better management of endangered species.

Over 1,650 species are listed as threatened or endangered, yet, in 2018, only three percent of listed species have successfully achieved recovery. Species recovery is not only a success for natural resource managers, it's also in the best interest of the species. Recovery of the black-footed ferret is a prime example of ESA success. In 1981, a Wyoming rancher discovered the species, which had previously been deemed extinct, on their ranch. Collaborative efforts between the rancher, federal and local government, tribal and additional partners ultimately led to recovery of the black-footed ferret. Unfortunately, ESA often leaves species on life-support, keeping them from achieving recovery that would allow for downlisting or delisting of the species. Yet, with the proper amendments to ESA, species can flourish. Local management efforts can help move this process forward and lend to species recovery.

Local decision-making, rather than litigation, is the most viable way to address environmental challenges and achieve positive results for our nation's threatened species. NACD appreciates your commitment to championing ESA issues and your crafting of this important legislation that offers meaningful solutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Palmer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tim Palmer
President
National Association of Conservation Districts