

Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Oversight Hearing
1324 Longworth House Office Building
May 22, 2019
10:00 am

Oversight hearing entitled, “Responding to the Global Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).”

Question from Rep. Huffman for Dr. Malcom, Defenders of Wildlife: Dr. Malcom, the IPBES report found that extinction rates are 20-29% lower than they would have been without conservation investment. Can you elaborate on what that means, and what conservation investments in the United States are contributing to the lower rate of extinction?

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in May before the Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife about the recent Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) *Summary for Policymakers*, and for the chance to address this question, which is critically important to understanding the past and guiding our actions into the future.

The estimated 20-29% reduction in extinction that the IPBES report identifies—as you noted in your question—shows that we can make a difference when we invest in conservation. In the U.S. that means, first and foremost, our investment in the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Over 95% of species listed under the ESA are still with us today, and hundreds are on the path to recovery. This record of success is made all the more stunning in light of the fact that we have invested less than 25% of what scientists say is needed to conserve ESA-listed species. Imagine what we can do for all of the species still on the brink if we fully fund the ESA!

It is also important to note that the ESA is just one of our tools for conserving biodiversity and the ecosystems on which wildlife and human society depend. In 1900, the U.S. passed the Lacey Act to address the issue of trafficking illegally collected plants or hunted wildlife. In 1918, following on the heels of the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon, we passed the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In 1970, the National Environmental Policy Act established a process to ensure the federal government and the public are aware of the effects of federal actions on the environment, while the Clean Air Act established national air quality standards. 1972 saw the passage of the Clean Water Act and the DDT ban, the latter of which was a response to science that highlighted the pesticide’s danger to birds like the Bald Eagle. These laws are all common-sense investments that help ensure we maintain our natural heritage and don’t lose species to extinction.

Our public lands are another critical tool in conservation because they host the habitats essential for so many species. Thousands of species depend on the National Forest System, the National Wildlife Refuge System, the National Park Service, lands administered by the Bureau of Land

Management, and lands managed by other departments, such as the Department of Defense. While some of these lands have multiple-use mandates, all agencies are still directed under the ESA to use their authorities to conserve threatened and endangered species.

We can use this hard-won knowledge, this evidence, to plan our actions to save species as we look to the future. The first step is for Congress to fully fund the ESA. While the vast majority of listed species have avoided extinction, too many have only stabilized at low levels or have continued to decline because of neglect. Congress can ensure that all threatened and endangered species receive the investment they need not only to hang on, but to thrive.

And of course, we should protect and invest in all of our laws and lands that ultimately protect species and the ecosystems on which they depend. We need to defend the ESA, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Clean Water Act and other critical laws protecting our environment from legislative and administrative attacks. We should address the decades of inadequate funding for agencies that implement these bedrock law. We should provide full funding, on a permanent basis, for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which provides crucial funding for acquiring and protecting lands for habitat as well as public parks and playgrounds. We should ensure proper funding of conservation programs for private lands in the Farm Bill and incentives in the ESA. Last, we should stop and reverse the damage from the Trump administration's alarming degradation of public lands that so many species depend on.

The data clearly show that we can make protection work, we just need to make the decision to do so.