

The Endangered Species Act



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Grizzly bear

In Montana, Thirty Years of Success

For more than 30 years, the Endangered Species Act has helped prevent the extinction of our national treasures. Because of the act, beloved symbols of America such as the bald eagle and the grizzly bear are thriving and rare species such as the black-footed ferret and the least tern are recovering in our prairies and wetlands.

Only nine of the 1,800 species protected by the act have been declared extinct since its passage in 1973. Such an astonishing success rate 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 communities work together to conserve their local wildlife and habitat. With the participation of communities, business and government, less than one percent of development projects reviewed under the act have been halted, proving that we can conserve wildlife without sacrificing progress. With the creation of jobs from tourism and outdoor recreation related to endangered species, it can truly be said that people all over Montana benefit from the act.

Montana currently has 15 endangered and threatened species (12 animals and 3 plants).

Grizzly Bear

When Lewis and Clark explored the West in the early 1800s, an estimated 50,000 grizzly bears roamed between the Pacific Ocean and the Great Plains, across vast stretches of open and unpopulated land. But when pioneers moved in, bears were overhunted and their numbers and range drastically declined. As European settlement expanded over the next hundred years, towns and cities sprang up, drastically shrinking grizzly habitat. Today, with the western United States inhabited by millions of Americans, only a few small pockets of grizzly country remain.

Under the Endangered Species Act, however, the Yellowstone grizzly bear population has made an encouraging recovery. The bear has rebounded from perhaps as few as 200 in 1974 to as many as 600 today. Although concerns remain about long-term sustainability, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed removing the Yellowstone grizzly bear population from the endangered species list.

The state of Montana has played a key role in the return of the grizzly. Through their participation in the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has provided crucial oversight of recovery in Yellowstone in addition to implementing the committee's recommendations to foster recovery. The management plan that the state has crafted is a sound road map for ensuring that grizzly bears continue to recover should federal protections be removed. One of the key factors contributing to increasing bear numbers is the reduction of conflicts between bears and humans. Montana employs four grizzly bear conflict specialists who are on the front-lines, working with local people on projects to foster coexistence.

The state has also taken important steps to protect crucial grizzly bear habitat. In 1995, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service helped negotiate two landmark agreements that partially resolved long-standing logging and grizzly issues in the Swan Valley. One involved 296,000 acres of public and corporate lands administered by Plum Creek Timber Company, the U.S.D.A. Forest Service and the state of Montana. In a separate but related agreement, Swan Valley



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Black-footed ferret

residents developed land management recommendations for private landowners on issues involving sanitation, subdivision, road construction, and real-estate disclosures. These agreements facilitate grizzly movement between the Mission Mountains and the more secure Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. They also help reduce human pressure on grizzlies during the critical spring feeding period, a key factor in grizzly bear recovery.

Black-Footed Ferret

The black-footed ferret is one of the rarest mammals in North America. It was believed to be extinct in the United States until a small population was discovered on a Wyoming ranch in 1981. In 1986, these animals suffered an outbreak of canine distemper, and wildlife officials captured the last 18 to start a captive-breeding program. Even though loss of habitat, conversion of grasslands to agricultural uses, widespread prairie dog eradication programs and plague had reduced ferret habitat to less than 2 percent of what once existed, biologists hoped to eventually release captive-bred ferrets and re-establish a wild population.

Beginning in 1994, after long discussions involving local ranchers, tribal leaders, the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Biological Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, ferrets were released in black-tailed prairie dog towns in northeastern Montana's Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. Starting in 2001, they were also released on nearby Bureau of Land Management land. Wild-born young prove that ferrets are successfully reproducing in

both locations, but a viable population has yet to be established at either. Ferret releases and research continue with hope of eventual success.

In Montana, the goal is to re-establish two viable populations with a minimum of 50 breeding adults in each. Nationwide, biologists hope to establish a wild pre-breeding population of 1,500 adults in 10 or more locations, with no fewer than 30 breeding adults in each location, by 2010. If these objectives are met, the ferret could be downlisted from endangered to threatened in the near future.

Bald Eagle

Thirty years of data collected by hardy Montana bird-watchers document the remarkable recovery of the bald eagle in Montana. Every December, hundreds of Montana residents gather for community bird counts to assess eagle numbers in such birding hotspots as Libby, Stevensville, Hamilton, Billings, Missoula, Ft. Peck and Bigfork. In 1975, these counts identified a mere 40 bald eagles statewide; in 2004, the count numbered 549. A high point was the Christmas bird count of 2001, during which birders counted some 756 bald eagles statewide. Back in 1975, bald eagles were found in only seven Montana communities. Today, they are routinely counted in about 30 different Montana communities.

In addition to these community efforts, official spring nesting surveys by wildlife management agencies also indicate the bald eagle population has grown substantially under the Endangered Species Act's protection, both in Montana and nationwide. Today, Montana is one of the top 10 bald

eagle producing states in the country, making it a true Endangered Species Act success story.

Economic Benefits of Protecting Wildlife and Habitat

Ecotourism represents a huge economic force in the country. Each year, millions of Americans travel and pay to view wildlife and take in all that nature has to offer. Much of this activity takes place on the hundreds of national wildlife refuges spread across the country. Nationwide, visits to wildlife refuges generated more than \$1.3 billion in income for local and state economies and an additional \$150 million in tax revenues. Indeed, national wildlife refuges received nearly twice as many visitors in 2004 than Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, Acadia, Grand Teton, and Statue of Liberty national parks combined. And the vast majority of those visitors came from outside the area, further testament to the ability of these special places to draw people and dollars to a region.

In Montana alone, the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge in the western part of the state generated \$1.4 million in economic activity for the local area. Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge in the northeastern northern part of the state generated \$248,100, and the nearby Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge generated an additional \$111,700.

For more information on the success of the Endangered Species Act, please visit www.saveesa.org.



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