

POLITICS OF EXTINCTION



The Unprecedented Republican Attack on Endangered Species and the Endangered Species Act

By the Center for Biological Diversity, September 2016

When it comes to protecting plants and animals on the brink of extinction, the Endangered Species Act is still our nation's most successful conservation law. From black-footed ferrets to piping plovers, the Act has prevented extinction for 99 percent of plants and animals under its protection. Last year the Center released a [comprehensive report](#) chronicling a 600 percent increase in legislative attacks against the Act and protected species since the U.S. Supreme Court ruling of *Citizens United*.

While our data analyzing the five-year period between 2011 and 2015 showed a six-fold increase in attacks, our updated analysis of legislative and congressional records now shows a 666 percent increase in the number of attacks on the Endangered Species Act and the wildlife it protects from January 2011 through August 2016.

In the past six years, Congress has launched at least [230 legislative attacks](#) on endangered species, for an average of 50 per year.¹

- By comparison, in the 15 years prior to 2011 (1996-2010), there were only 69 legislative attacks on endangered species, fewer than five per year on average.
- Overall 94 percent of the attacks in the past 20 years have been sponsored by Republicans. These attacks coincide with increased congressional campaign contributions from industries such as oil and gas and agribusiness, which believe their bottom lines are threatened by endangered species protections.
- Specifically, oil and gas contributions going directly to Congress have jumped from \$24 million in 2010 to an annual average of \$30.4 million after the *Citizens United* ruling. Agribusiness contributions have jumped from \$46.8 million in 2010 to an annual average of \$51.4 million after the ruling.²
- The 114th Congress is the most anti-wildlife Congress we have ever had. It is currently responsible for 44 percent of all legislative attacks made in the past 20 years, having introduced at least 132 anti-Endangered Species Act bills just since January 2015.

¹ Data on legislative attacks is updated regularly on our website.

² Data on campaign contributions was derived from OpenSecrets.org. It should be noted that data on the election cycle in 2016 is not yet complete, and the campaign contributions for 2016 are predicted to reach record heights.

These legislative attacks range from prematurely stripping federal protections from specific species to blocking listings (in contravention of the best available science) to weakening how the Act works. For instance, since the passage of the 2011 wolf rider that removed protections from gray wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains, there have been at least 32 congressional legislative attacks on wolves seeking to allow state-regulated hunting and trapping of the animals. A dozen of those bills were introduced by the 114th Congress alone. Likewise, other bills seek to do things like block implementations of biological opinions, court settlements, or exempt projects from the Act’s consultation requirements.

Overall our trend analysis concludes that the number of anti-Endangered Species Act attacks is ever-increasing, with the use of unrelated policy riders tacked onto must-pass spending legislation also increasing. For example, the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, National Defense Authorization Act and other appropriations bills for fiscal year 2017 showcases more than 30 policy riders that are currently being considered, compared with last year’s bills, which contained approximately 27 anti-ESA riders. Unrelated policy riders tacked onto spending bills currently account for one-third of all the anti-ESA attacks in the past 20 years.

Scientists, not politicians in Congress, should decide which species are protected under the Endangered Species Act. According to a 2015 poll, more than 90 percent of American voters support the Act and the species it protects. The opponents of endangered species protections are clearly out of step with the American public and demonstrate the urgency need to (1) maintain the integrity of the Act and (2) limit the influence of money in politics.

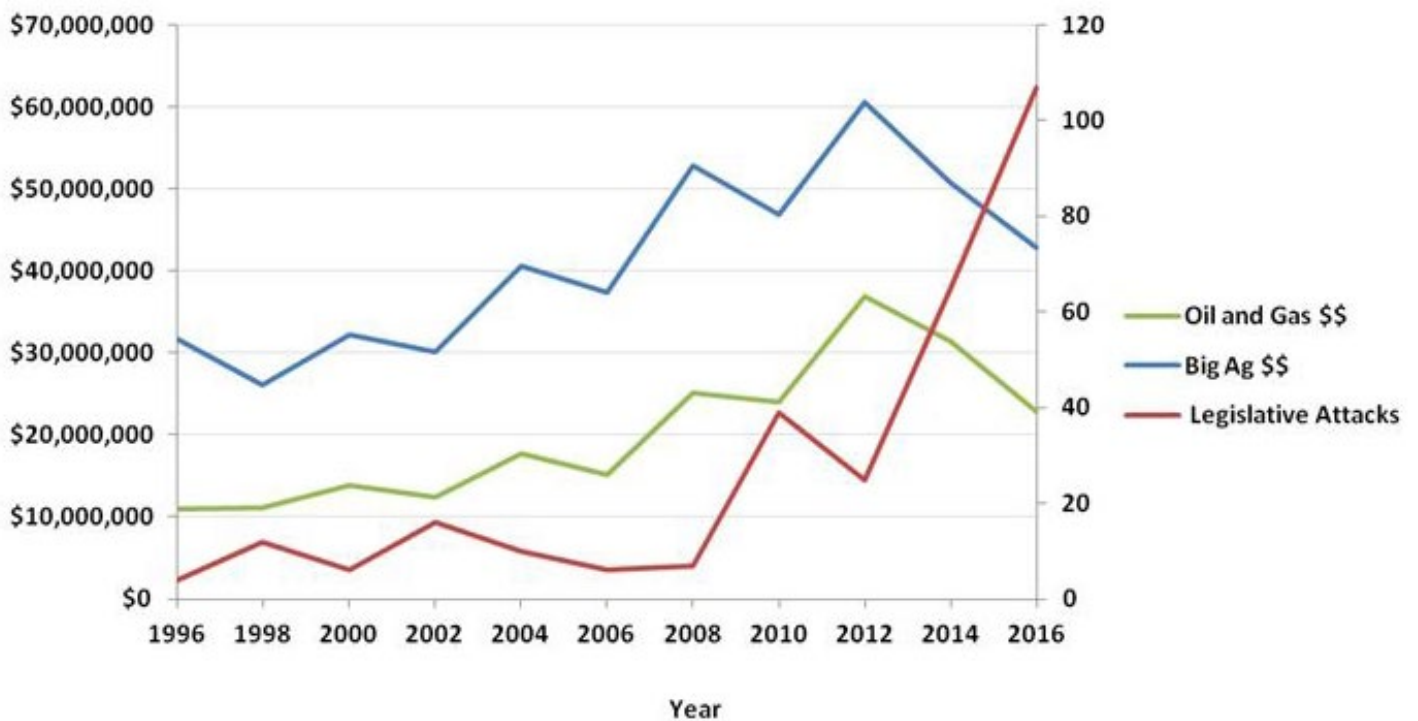


Figure 1. Legislative attacks (1996-2016) on endangered species compared with campaign contributions from two industries that have opposed protection of endangered species.