The Boston Globe

MARCH 13, 2006 BOSTON, MA.

Flora, Fauna and Folly

GLOBE EDITORIAL

LAST YEAR, the House gutted important provisions of the Endangered Species Act, benefiting developers and drillers who do not want their projects slowed by concerns for plants and animals facing extinction. Now it is up to the Senate to defend a law that has kept the nation's symbol, the bald eagle, from disappearing from the lower 48 states.

As chairman of the Environment committee's Fish, Wildlife, and Water subcommittee, Senator Lincoln Chafee, Republican of Rhode Island, is in a position to ensure that any changes to the law are improvements, not loopholes. The House bill would change the law's very purpose by limiting designation of protected habitats to areas needed to save a species from imminent extinction, rather than the current standard of recovery. The House bill also would require federal agencies to ignore species protection if it interferes with their mission. The Defense Department already has this authority, which would now be extended to agencies overseeing oil and gas drilling, mining, and timbering. Scientists, in making judgments about species survivability, would be forbidden in the House bill from using models, genetic studies, or population surveys. The bill would shift the decision of what constitutes ''best available science" from scientists to political appointees in the Department of the Interior.

Last week, more than 5,700 biologists wrote senators warning against weakening the scientific basis of a law that they describe as ''well-functioning." The biologists write: ''Losing a species means losing the potential to solve some of humanity's most intractable problems, including hunger and disease."

Thanks to the 1973 law, fewer than 1 percent of listed species have gone extinct. But the law is not perfect. Since it was enacted with a unanimous vote in the Senate and just five nays in the House, scientists have learned about the threat to species of global warming. Any reform bill should force the country to address the greenhouse gases that cause climate change. The agencies that work to enforce the law need more funding to ensure that species in need of protection become listed in a timely manner. Nearly one-third of native US species are at risk of vanishing.

Chafee said Friday that he and other environmentalists in the Senate worry that any bill the Senate passes would lead to the conference committee producing a bill closer to the House's, which Chafee called a ''detriment to progress on reform." No bill is better than a bad bill. Chafee and others who care about conservation must ensure that the endangered species law -- and the species it protects -- do not fall victim to proponents of heedless exploitation of the country's resources.

Providence Journal

MARCH 8, 2006 PROVIDENCE, RI.

An excellent act

EDITORIAL

Congress is debating whether the Endangered Species Act should be modified. Since 1973, the law has stood as part of American environmentalism's Holy Four. The National Environmental Policy Act (1969), the Clean Air Act (1970), and the Clean Water Act (1972) have been periodically revised over the years, so some in Congress are asking why the Endangered Species Act shouldn't also be. They have a point; nothing in legislation should be held sacred. Yet care must be taken in addressing this act.

This law sets strict penalties on the killing of endangered species of animals and plants, and it gives the government broad authority in regulating land and water use to protect species' habitat and feeding areas. The authority, which pins survival of species on preserving their ecosystems, has been a key factor -- along with changes in land use -- in the return of many species to areas where they had been absent for decades, if not centuries.

New Englanders over the last 30 to 40 years, as fields have reverted to forest, have witnessed growth in the populations of white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, black bears and other species. Some of these once rare creatures, such as Canada geese, are now in certain places even considered nuisances.

Elsewhere in the country, the problems have been more serious. In the West, mining and timbering interests say that they have been badly hurt by restrictions related to species' habitats; the spotted owl in Northwestern old-growth forests is a celebrated example. California Congressman Richard Pombo, chairman of the House Resources Committee, is promoting changes in the Endangered Species Act to compensate landowners for losses produced by compliance with the act. There may be cases in which such an approach is justified, and judicious modification of the act could go a long way toward diminishing some of its harsher economic impacts.

Still, the Endangered Species Act has been remarkably effective. Virtually all the species it has listed as endangered have seen their numbers stabilize or increase. Much of the United States has become an ecologically healthier place than it was in the 1960s for wild creatures and plants, thanks in great part to this act.

The bald eagle, lately removed from the Endangered Species List, is an example. By the '60s, owing to DDT's use as a pesticide, the bird was almost extinct in the lower 48 states. Then, DDT was found to interfere with raptors' reproduction, so its use was discontinued. Now the bald eagle is common in much of America -- it sometimes even appears in southeastern New England. And all eagles, falcons, and hawks have benefited from the elimination of DDT from the environment; most of these species have gained numbers.

Legislation as old and important as the Endangered Species Act may require tweaking. But this law has been a triumph, and should therefore be preserved.

Hartford Courant.

An Endangered Species Act

March 19, 2006 - Hartford, CT.

EDITORIAL

By any measure, the federal Endangered Species Act is a remarkable piece of legislation. Signed by President Richard Nixon in December 1973, it still ranks as the most powerful law in the world for protecting plants and animals and for retrieving them from the brink of extinction.

In three decades, hundreds of plant and animal species have been given a fighting chance for survival. The California condor, once endangered, has multiplied and expanded its range and today soars above the Grand Canyon. The gray wolf has returned to Yellowstone National Park. By the mid-1960s, the bald eagle, our national symbol, had dwindled to 417 pairs in the continental United States; today, the population stands at nearly 8,000 pairs - several are in Connecticut - and there's talk of removing the bird from the list of threatened and endangered species.

That's a proud record of accomplishment - one the Endangered Species Act should be permitted to build upon and improve.

Instead, revisions adopted by the House last year would gut the law. Written by Republican Rep. Richard Pombo of California, chairman of the Resources Committee, the changes would strip protections from 150 million acres of critical habitat. Pesticides would be exempted, allowing the use of poisons in areas inhabited by endangered species. Decisions now made by scientists about the kind of data used to list species under the law would instead be made by the secretary of the interior, putting politics ahead of science. Would-be developers who could claim their plans for land had been thwarted by the Endangered Species Act could seek compensation from the federal government - a system that seems ripe for fraud and abuse.

Now, the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee is getting its crack at rewriting the law. The chairman, Republican Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma, is trying for a bipartisan approach and hopes to have the proposal ready by late this month.

For all the successes, the work of the Endangered Species Act is not done. Currently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists 1,300 plant and animal species as threatened or endangered. Yet there are areas where the law can be streamlined. For almost seven years, officials have been seeking to remove the bald eagle from the list of threatened and endangered species (it is amply protected under other federal and state laws). The effort remains snarled in red tape.

The law might also be improved by a shift in focus. Pollution and hunting no longer present the worst threats to endangered species. Instead, it's development and loss of habitat. Much of that loss is occurring on private lands. Environmental groups are suggesting an expanded role for the Endangered Species Act that would entail working with landowners to enhance habitat and restore wildlife.

The central legacy of the Endangered Species Act is the preservation of plant and animal species. But the successes of this law affirm what Americans can accomplish when they devote resources and commitment to a problem. On that score, the cynical modifications to the Endangered Species Act proposed by Mr. Pombo and approved by the House are a disservice to Americans, the environment and that legacy. Congress must do a lot better.

Concord Monitor

Senate Should Vote to Save Vanishing Species

March 6, 2006 - Concord, NH.

EDITORIAL

Environmental protection has become an endangered species. Now Congress is poised to gut the Endangered Species Act itself, the law that put peregrine falcons back on the White Mountains' cliffs and the bald eagle back on the Merrimack.
California Republican Rep. Richard Pombo has stalked the Endangered Species Act for a decade. Pombo is chairman of the House Resources Committee. In one breath he has been selling his bill as an effort to help endangered species by enlisting the voluntary cooperation of landowners. In the next, he has sponsored bills to eliminate habitat protection on 150 million acres of public land and make it legal to reopen old mining claims in national parks. His agenda is clear.

Last fall, he succeeded in convincing his colleagues to pass a bill weakening the law in ways that will doom some species to extinction. Pombo believes that the owners of private property should be compensated for any loss they incur when the act prevents them from developing their land to its maximum potential.

Some level of compensation is only fair. Doing it Pombo-style, however, would make the act too expensive to enforce because it requires that government pay owners the maximum market price for the land.

A mere threat to develop -"Give me $100 million or I'll shoot this duck"-might be enough to make a landowner rich.

In reality, the act does not forbid development. It requires that landowners take steps to minimize damage to endangered species. Since the act was passed, only six requests to conduct activities that would incidentally harm a species out of 768 requests for permission to do so have been denied.
Pombo's bill would take the job of deciding when a species is endangered out of the hands of independent scientists and give it to the secretary of the interior. That would give life and death power over a species or an ecosystem to a political appointee who may want to curry favor with supporters or do industry's bidding in exchange for a reward down the road.

The bill also requires government to decide Endangered Species Act matters within 180 days. That's far less time than it takes to conduct a proper environmental assessments by experts. Yet if the government failed to act in time, the bulldozers could roll.

Pombo and his supporters have dubbed the Endangered Species Act a failure since only a dozen or so of the 1,300 species on the list have made a successful recovery. Their argument is specious. The act has been a success. It's not in need of serious revision.

New Hampshire is home to seven endangered and five threatened species. Before Sens. Judd Gregg and John Sununu vote on Pombo's bill, they should read the Department of Fish and Game's description of the act's impact on their own state.

"Only nine species have gone extinct since the ESA was signed into law in 1973, while more than 1,250 species have recovery plans in place" the department said. "Without the Endangered Species Act, the peregrine falcon may have ended up like its cousin the passenger pigeon."

The fate of a single life is an massive responsibility, but the fate of a whole species should not be for man to decide. If the Senate makes the wrong decision, some forms of life that could have been saved will forever vanish from the Earth.

The Newport Daily News

MARCH 8, 2006

Species Act Needs Help from Chafee

EDITORIAL

Newport, RI. - "Nothing is more priceless and more worthy of preservation than the rich array of animal life with which our country has been blessed," President Nixon said when he signed the Endangered Species Act in 1973.

More than 30 years later, the law that led to the revival of the American bald eagle and other species - including the piping plover here on Aquidneck Island - itself is endangered.

The U.S. House of Representatives last fall narrowly passed a bill that completely would rewrite the Endangered Species Act. Spearheaded by U.S. Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Calif., the bill would weaken protections for endangered species while creating loopholes that could benefit developers, utilities, timber companies and pesticide makers and users - in other words, those whose activities have been curtailed to prevent a variety of animals, insects and plants from disappearing from the Earth.

Unfortunately, that seems to be the way of the federal government of late - take a strong environmental law passed some 30 years ago and try to strip it of any worth.

The U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee is working on its own revision of the Endangered Species Act. As chairman of its Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Water, Sen. Lincoln Chafee, R-R.I., plays a critical role in this discussion and decision-making process.

Chafee asked the nonprofit Keystone Center to study the act and make recommendations to further the Senate's discussions. Last month, the center's Working Group on Habitat reported that the regulations could be improved to better address the biological needs of species and reduce the concerns of regulated parties, with specific focus on habitat protection, the most controversial aspect of the act. The group also stressed the need for a centralized operation and better incentives, both of which likely would require more funding.

While the group did not come to a clear consensus on how best to achieve those goals, it did provide significant fodder for discussion. A full report from the Keystone Center is expected "within days," according to Chafee spokesman Stephen Hourahan. Meanwhile, Chafee is negotiating with other senators to wait for the full report before debating any proposed changes to the act.

Unfortunately, that may not happen - Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, said this week he may advance his own version of the act if Chafee's committee does not do so soon.

We urge Chafee - who likes to align himself with his father, the late U.S. Sen. John Chafee, as an environmentally minded Republican - and his fellow senators not to rush headlong into changes that could threaten the success of the Endangered Species Act. That success is symbolized best by the comeback of the American bald eagle, which was reduced to as few as 450 breeding pairs

in the 1960s and has flourished to about 9,000 pairs, precipitating its removal from the list.

Overall, 50 percent of species on the federal list have stabilized or are improving. Species that have been on the list for 15 years or more fare better - 66 percent are stable or improving, studies have shown.

That record is even more noteworthy in the Northeast, where no endangered species have gone extinct and 93 percent have increased their population size or become stable since being protected under the act, according to a recent study by the Center for Biological Diversity.

"The Endangered Species Act has been remarkably successful," said Kieran Suckling, policy director of the center and author of the report. "Humpback whales, bald eagles, brown pelicans ... sea turtles, piping plovers, roseate terns, red-bellied turtles, and dwarf cinquefoils are just a few of the species that are recovering quite nicely."

Locally, readers may relate best to the piping plover, a species of bird that nearly was wiped out because of overhunting in the 1800s, when their feathers were used in women's hat wear. Increased development and recreational use of the beaches also reduced their numbers over the years, but with the benefit of federal protection - plovers are listed as threatened in Rhode Island and endangered in other areas of the country - and growing awareness, recent figures show there are as many as 1,400 plover pairs along the Atlantic Coast, more than 50 of which are in Rhode Island. Four years ago, the first plover sighting on Aquidneck Island in more than 50 years was reported - and each year since, a few of those birds have made Sachuest and Third beaches in Middletown their home.

In a February press release, Chafee cited the piping plover as an example "of the power of the ESA to protect and recover species."

The piping plover also rated a mention in a recent press release from the Rhode Island Public Interest Group. We join that group and others in calling upon Chafee to take a strong stand in support of the Endangered Species Act, and to give no quarter to special-interest groups who have been fighting it for years, despite its record of environmental success.

The Republican

Going out on a limb to save rare species

March 9, 2006 - Spingfield, MA.

EDITORIAL

The American bald eagle was near extinction 30 years ago when it became one of the first species to be protected by the Endangered Species Act.

Today, it is fully recovered and ready to come off the list.

This should be a moment to celebrate; a time to give your best impression of a whooping crane - and whoop it up.

Hold your horses.

Lawmakers in Congress are considering legislation that would dismantle the Endangered Species Act, the landmark legislation signed into law in 1973 by President Nixon.

Last year, the U.S. House passed a reckless bill sponsored by Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Calif., that would weaken habitat protections and expand the rights of property owners. The Senate is about to debate its own version of a bill to declaw the legislation.

Critics say that too few of the listed species have recovered under the legislation, and that it unfairly burdens property owners.

Here in the Northeast, the Endangered Species Act has been a success. According to a report by the Center for Biological Diversity, a nonprofit conservation group based in Arizona, the landmark legislation has been "remarkably successful" in the Northeast, with 93 percent of the species listed in the region either stabilizing or increasing in population since going on the list. No species on the list has gone extinct. The study is the first ever assessment of population trends of species on the protection list. There will be more to come, and it's reasonable to assume the results of those studies will also show the value of the Endangered Species Act.

Among the species whose populations increased in the Northeast were the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, humpback whale and Karner blue butterfly.

Every animal and plant on this planet is irreplaceable. One of the most effective ways to protect a species on the edge of extinction is to protect its natural habitat.

If lawmakers need inspiration to defend the Endangered Species Act and safeguard it from its own extinction, they should read the story of the bald eagle and its return. If critics of the Endangered Species Act had written the original law, our national symbol might as well have been the dodo bird.

If the critics succeed, there may be no more success stories.

CAPE COD TIMES

MARCH 15, 2006 CAPE COD, MA.

Back from the brink

For endangered species, not losing ground is the same as gaining

EDITORIAL

The U.S. Senate will soon be rewriting the Endangered Species Recovery Act of 1973. A bitter battle looms.

The House has approved a dreadful bill authored by Rep. Richard Pombo of California, chair of the House Resources Committee. It would emasculate the ESA and would surely let dozens of species drift toward extinction.

Indeed, it has been said that if the bald eagle had to claw through the layers of costs and consultations that the Pombo bill prescribes, its numbers would still hover below the 500 pairs of the 1960s instead of the 9,000 pairs now estimated.

The Senate rewrite, fashioned by a subcommittee led by Sen. Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island, is expected to be a more honest attempt to augment the good and fix the bad of the 1973 act. The problem will come when lawmakers of the two houses clash in conference committee, a venue in which House leaders often have White House backing.

Some of the criticism of the existing program is warranted. It has proven easier to list an endangered species than to designate its critical habitat; almost 1,300 species are listed but only about 400 habitats have been defined, a necessary step for survival. The science of fashioning recovery programs has proven surprisingly difficult. It has taken years for the feds and the locals to recognize the value of ground-level partnerships.

But the main difficulty is that the program is not adequately funded. The administration whines that it lacks funds to do what needs to be done, but its budget requests fall far below the acknowledged need.

The Pombo-alikes clamor about meager results - only 14 species have been declared out of danger, a dismal 1 percent success rate, they say.

Well, do they expect that decades of degradation can be reversed in a heartbeat?

The goal of ESA is to prevent extinction; the take-home fact is that only 1 percent of the listed species have disappeared. The rest survive and, for the most part, are gaining ground. How can you argue with a 99 percent success rate?

A recent Center for Biological Diversity report brings the discussion closer to home. In the Northeast, 93 percent of the enlisted species are stable or increasing.

There were only 550 pairs of piping plovers in 1986; now Massachusetts alone has some 625 pairs. The pretty little sandplain gerardia, thought extinct until 1980, now blooms in Sandwich, Falmouth and Martha's Vineyard, profuse one year, struggling the next. Massachusetts had five pair of bald eagles in 1986, 19 now. American burying beetles from Block Island, the only eastern colony, have been planted in Nantucket. And so it goes, inch by inch.

The Endangered Species Act can certainly be fine-tuned, but effective protection of all species must remain a national policy. Horseshoe crab blood, enzymes from the hot springs of Yellowstone, these and hundreds of other species contribute to our well-being. Their loss would be our loss.

The Washington Post

Endangered Species Act Works

March 6, 2006

By Juliet Eilperin

WASHINGTON D.C. - No endangered species in the Northeast has gone extinct since coming under federal protection, according to a study by an environmental group, and 93 percent have either increased their numbers or become stable.

The report by the Center for Biological Diversity is described as the first long-term study of population trends for endangered species. Researchers looked at 53 species in eight states -- Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont -- that had been listed as federally endangered for at least six years. The success stories included birds such as the Atlantic piping plover and the roseate tern, as well as humpback and blue whales.

The American burying beetle once roamed from Nova Scotia to Florida to South Dakota; now Block Island, R.I., hosts the only native population east of the Mississippi. That population stabilized in the mid-1990s and grew to 577 in 2005. In New Hampshire, the native dwarf cinquefoil, a member of the rose family, landed on the endangered species list in 1980. But scientists rediscovered one small population and planted another, and the flower made it off the list in 2002.

"The data are now in, and it's clear that the Endangered Species Act is effective," said the center's policy director, Kieran Suckling, the author of the report.

House Resources Committee Chairman Richard W. Pombo (R-Calif.) has been trying to revise the Endangered Species Act. Spokesman Brian Kennedy said Friday the report "has the whiff of a political endeavor and a hint of Enron-style accounting."

The dwarf cinquefoil, a member of the rose family, was added to the endangered species list in 1980, but removed in 2002 as plant populations increased. (By Thomas G. Barnes -- Natural Res. Con. Serv.)

Newsday.com

Health/Science

March 7, 2006 - Melville, NY.

Protected life

No endangered species in the Northeast has gone extinct since coming under federal protection, according to a study by an environmental group, and 93 percent have increased their numbers or become stable. The researchers of the Center for Biological Diversity looked at 53 species in eight states - Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont - listed as federally endangered for at least six years.

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR csmonitor.com

THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 2006

Endangered, but on road to recovery

By MARK CLAYTON
Staff Writer

FRAMINGHAM, MA. Is the Endangered Species Act really helping the piping plover, Delmarva Fox squirrel and more than 1,300 plants and animals on the protected list survive - or is it as critics argue - a costly failure?

One of the nation's landmark environmental laws, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is the focus of congressional overhaul legislation. Reformers say the act wastes taxpayers' money, spawns costly lawsuits, and does little to help endangered species.

But a independent study released Tuesday suggests otherwise, showing populations of most listed species in the Northeast improved significantly under the ESA, the bald eagle most notably. Other species are stabilizing, the report said.

Concern about altering the ESA brought about the first-of-its-kind study by the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), an environmental group based in Tucson , Ariz. It compiles federal, state, and university research to provide long-term population trend data for the large majority of endangered species in the Northeast.

At least 38 of 41 endangered species in the Northeast have increased in number or maintained stable populations since being listed, the report says. About 7 percent of species are in decline. No species has become extinct since being listed. The analysis included all species for which there were at least six years of data and a recovery timeline, comprising 73 percent of those listed.

"We find that the Endangered Species Act has been remarkably successful in the region," said the CBD report.

In particular, the bald eagle soared from 417 pairs in 1963 to 7,230 by 2003. Populations of the American peregrine falcon, the Atlantic piping plover, the humpback whale, the Puritan tiger beetle, and the American Hart's-tounge fern also increased.

"It often takes many years on the [ESA] list before some populations even begin to rebound," says Peter Galvin, CBD conservation director. "These species didn't become endangered overnight, and people shouldn't expect them to recover overnight."

That's unlikely to satisfy those in Congress who say the act is a boondoggle. Less than 1 percent of the endangered species put on the list since 1973 have recovered enough to be taken off, critics say.

Leading the way to change the ESA is Rep. Richard Pombo (R) of California , chairman of the House Resources Committee. He sponsored ESA overhaul legislation that passed the House last fall. Similar ESA legislation could surface in the Senate

COMEBACK:

The population of the endangered red-bellied cooter turtle in Massachusetts has jumped 10 percent in the past 20 years.

JOSH ARMSTRONG

as soon as this month, observers say.

Government data "makes it clear the vast majority of these species have not improved," said Mr. Pombo in a statement last year. Just 10 species have recovered enough to be removed from the list since the act was passed in 1973, with 60 percent of species "uncertain" or "declining," according to US Fish and Wildlife Service reports.

But that biennial report to Congress charts "declines" and other species' status on a two-year time frame, during which plant populations can fluctuate dramatically, Mr. Galvin says, citing a need for long-term information.

But Brian Kennedy, a spokesman for Pombo's committee, says those "declines" are accurate. The CBD report, he says, uses US Fish and Wildlife Service data that are being revised, and so are "unreliable and not meaningful."

Mr. Kennedy agrees that collecting long-term species population data is a good idea - and that Pombo's overhaul does this. For its part, the CBD study shows the average recovery plan for Northeast species is 42 years, Galvin says.

For example, a little pond turtle called the northern red-bellied Cooter found in southern Massachusetts was down to 300 in 1985 and is now at 3,000. Though the cooter has been on the list for 20 years, the first hatchlings have been breeding for only five. A cooter begins to breed at age 14.

"Because of the systems we've worked out we know it won't disappear again," says Tom French of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. "Whether it will ever thrive again we don't know.... We're still working for that long-term goal." The cost to taxpayers to save the cooter is about $5,000 to $15,000 a year.

Also on the list is the slow-reproducing shortnose sturgeon on the Hudson River. It increased from 12,669 spawning fish in 1979 to 56,708 by 1996. Meanwhile, the Atlantic piping plover, a shore bird increased from 550 pairs in 1986 to 1,423 by 2004. Each has a long way to go, but they've made strides, Galvin says.

"The data in this report does show that many endangered species are making significant progress toward recovery," says Michael Bean, chair of the wildlife program for Environmental Defense, a Washington environmental group. "It refutes the claim that the act has failed because there are not more species delisted. This shows a lot are making progress. They're not there yet, but they're headed in the right direction."

USA TODAY

February 28, 2006

Study: Endangered Species Act effective

FRAMINGHAM, MA.--The Endangered Species Act has been "remarkably successful" in the Northeast, a Center for Biological Diversity report said Tuesday. The Center for Bioloigical Diversity examined the 53 species listed under the act for more than six years and found that 93% had increased or stabilized their populations, including the Eastern gray wolf and the Atlantic leatherback sea turtle. Nationwide, more than 1,300 species are listed under the act, which was created in 1973 and requires protections to prevent extinction. The report comes amid proposals to alter the act in Congress, where critics say that too few of the listed species have recovered under the act and that the law unfairly burdens property owners.*

*(Corrected from an earlier misprint that stated the New England Wild Flower Society had released the report. The NEWFS hosted the press conference where the report was released and are partners with the Center for Biological Diversity.)

Providence Journal

MARCH 1, 2006 PROVIDENCE, RI.

Backers of Endangered Species Act

Representatives of the Center for Biological Diversity, based in Arizona, come to Providence to show how well species are recovering.

BY KAREN LEE ZINER

Providence - If not for the Endangered Species Act, a black-and-orange spotted beetledubbed "nature's little embalmer" for its remarkable recycling of carrion, would almost certainly have gone the way of the dodo bird, rather than increase its fragile foothold on Block Island.

So too, the Atlantic piping plover and the Karner blue butterfly are success stories of federal environmental protection, advocates said yesterday.

As opponents work to revise -- and many say gut -- the 32-year-old Endangered Species Act, the Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity yesterday held news conferences in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New York to tout the act's success in the northeastern United States.

The center released results of a population trend study of all 54 endangered species that currently or historically bred or migrated through the Northeast.

Stars of the center's report include the Atlantic piping plover, whose numbers have increased through protective efforts in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and the American burying beetle, whose sole remaining natural colony east of the Mississippi is on Block Island.

"We discovered that 93 percent of the listed species have either improved or remained stable," said Melissa Waage, policy advocate for the center. Waage spoke at the Roger Williams Park Zoo.

"We came out with this report now, while there are open questions on how well the [Endangered Species Act] has fulfilled its purpose," said Waage. "No one had ever taken a good, comprehensive look at how well the species were recovering under the act.

"Now we know those numbers, and we know the act is working to bring those creatures from the edge of extinction towards the point where they won't need this kind of protection," said Waage.

Critics have said the act isn't working because not enough listed species have recovered, said Waage. "What this report shows is they're on the way to recovery and it's certainly disingenuous to criticize" based on short-term data. "It's just a longer-term process than some say it is."

Among the most vocal critics of the Endangered Species Act is U.S. Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Calif., who last September pushed a bill through the House "that would gut the Endangered Species Act," said Waage.

Pombo's bill would repeal protections against hazardous pesticides, and eliminate habitat protections. He has argued that it puts "endangered flies, beetles, rats and shellfish" before people.

"The important thing to note is federal scientists say it's going to take 42 years for a species to recover, but on average has only been on the list for 24 years. So there's work to be done. The report is encouraging, that in the intervening time we will get them there," said Waage.

The report notes, "Declaring the Endangered Species Act a failure for not having recovered these species is akin to declaring a 10-day antibiotic treatment a failure because it didn't cure the infection on day three."

According to the report, improving species include the American bald eagle, American peregrine falcon, Arctic peregrine falcon, Atlantic piping plover, roseate

tern, humpback whale, fin whale, right whale, Delmarva fox squirrel, shortnose sturgeon, American burying beetle,
dwarf cinquefoil, "and many ot hers."

Only three species declined: the Indiana bat, the Puritan tiger beetle, and the American hart's-tongue fern.

The number of nesting pairs of bald eagles increased in the Northeast from 21 in 1967 to 562 in 2005, the report states, including in Rhode Island. The number of Atlantic piping plovers has climbed since it was placed on the endangered list in 1985; the number of nesting pairs grew from 550 in 1986 to 1,423 pairs in 2004, according to the report.

Zookeeper Lou Perrotti, coordinator for the American burying beetle conservation project, spoke about the zoo's collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Massachusetts Fish & Game Service, Nantucket Conservation Society, and the Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island, to establish American burying beetle colonies on Nantucket. The beetles disappeared from the island in the 1920s.

The American burying beetle's naturally occurring populations once ranged over 30 states and at the borders of three Canadian provinces. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service placed the beetles on the Endangered Species list in 1989.

"From what we can see, yes, it's doing well," Perrotti said. "The naturally occurring population on Block Island -- it seems to be holding strong and even improving." Biologists estimate the population at around 3,000.

Since 1994, said Perrotti, "We've released like a little over 2,500 beetles on the island of Nantucket. They are maintaining a presence. We are catching beetles when we go over in the spring" each year.

This year and next, biologists will monitor to see whether the beetles have established self-sustaining populations, by trapping and counting insects.

The traps are "pitfall traps -- it's a jar sunk into the ground, baited with some of the most rotted chicken you're ever gonna smell in yourlife," he said.

Waxing poetic on the attributes of the American burying beetle, Perrotti said, "They clean up mortality. They take death, and it's recycled as soil."

JSOnline
MILWAUKEE
JOURNAL SENTINEL

Endanagered Species holding own

Most in Northeast have stabilized or grown under federal protection

March 12, 2006 - Milwaukee, WI

Washington Post

No endangered species in the Northeast has gone extinct since coming under federal protection, according to a study by an environmental group, and 93% have either increased their numbers or become stable.

The report by the Center for Biological Diversity is described as the first long-term study of population trends for endangered species.

Researchers looked at 53 species in eight states - Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont - that had been listed as federally endangered for at least six years.

The success stories included birds such as the Atlantic piping plover and the roseate tern, as well as humpback and blue whales.

The American burying beetle once roamed from Nova Scotia to Florida to South Dakota; now Block Island, R.I., hosts the only native population east of the Mississippi.

That population stabilized in the mid-1990s and grew to 577 in 2005.

In New Hampshire, the native dwarf cinquefoil, a member of the rose family, landed on the endangered species list in 1980.

But scientists rediscovered one small population and planted another, and the flower made it off the list in 2002.

“The data are now in, and it’s clear that the Endangered Species Act is effective,” said the center’s policy director, Kieran Suckling, author of the report.

House Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo (R-Calif.) has been trying to revise the Endangered Species Act.

Spokesman Brian Kennedy said recently that the report “has the whiff of a political endeavor and a hint of Enron-style accounting.”

The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

February 27, 2006

Act accomplishes its purpose

By JON BRODKIN

Framingham, MA - A study to be released tomorrow will show that the Endangered Species Act has successfully protected 93 percent of troubled species in the Northeast.

The report, to be presented at Garden in the Woods, is a "rebuttal" to claims the federal law impedes economic progress without providing real benefits, said William Brumback, conservation director of the New England Wild Flower Society in Framingham.

"There's been a lot of controversy about the Endangered Species Act and some people, mostly in the West, are constantly trying to undermine the act, its effect on stopping certain projects," Brumback said. The report is "a rebuttal in a lot of ways to people who say the act isn't working well. In the Northeast, it is working."

The study, conducted by the Center for Biological Diversity in Tucson, Ariz., analyzed all 54 federally listed endangered plants and animals that breed and migrate in New England, New York and New Jersey. The center found that 93 percent of the species have improved or maintained their populations.

The center is releasing the study tomorrow at events in New York City; Providence, R.I.; and the Wild Flower Society's Garden in the Woods in Framingham. The Framingham event is scheduled for 10 a.m. at 180 Hemenway Road.

The event will feature presentations by the Center for Biological Diversity and New England-area scientists and conservationists. Brumback will discuss the Wild Flower Society's role in protecting the Robbin's cinquefoil, a plant found only in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

The plant has been removed from the Endangered Species List following a recovery effort that included moving a trail out of the cinquefoil's way, and growing new plants to bolster its population.

"The (Endangered Species) Act is working to improve the health of our environment. That's the bottom line," Brumback said.

The Republican

Endangered Species Thrive

March 1, 2006

By STAN FREEMAN

Framingham, MA. - The federal Endangered Species Act has been "remarkably successful" in the Northeast, with the populations of 93 percent of species listed in the region either stabilizing or increasing since going on the list, according to a report from a conservation group.

In addition, no Northeast species has gone extinct since being put on the list, said the report by the Center for Biological Diversity, a nonprofit conservation group based in Arizona.

"The 93 percent was a higher number than we had anticipated. It was a bit surprising," said Peter J. Galvin, conservation director for the center.

"It's possible and maybe even probable that the rate is a bit higher in the Northeast than in other parts of the country because of the strong involvement of state agencies, institutions and conservation groups ... That's played a large role in the recovery of species," he said.

The group plans to do similar studies for other parts of the country this year, he said. The Northeast study was intended to be the first assessment of population trends of species listed under the landmark 1973 federal Endangered Species Act.

While the act is 33 years old, "long-term population trend data have never been systematically gathered and analyzed for a large, unbiased sample of species," the report said.

The group studied 41 Northeast species whose population trends were known. For eight others, no consistent data existed. Three species lost population since being listed - the Indiana bat, American Hart's-tongue fern and the Puritan tiger beetle, although the group found the tiger beetle's population had increased in the Connecticut River Valley due to "intense habitat management and a reintroduction program."

The group found the populations of 27 species, or 66 percent of those studied, had increased since being listed, and the populations of 11 species, 27 percent of those studied, remained stable. Among the Northeast species whose populations had increased were the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, humpback whale, Karner blue butterfly and dwarf cinquefoil, a wildflower.

One of the conservation groups credited by the center with helping endangered species recover was the New England Wild Flower Society.

William E. Brumback, conservation director for the society, said it has been active in establishing a seed bank of the region's rare plants. However, he said, in many cases it is difficult to raise endangered plants from seed and then transplant them into the wild, because their habitat needs are often endangered as well. Some grow only in the alpine conditions on mountain tops. Others need especially acidic conditions found around bogs.

Brumback called the report's findings "a pleasant surprise."

CAPE COD TIMES

Scientists see hope for endangered species in the Northeast

March 1, 2006

By EMILY C. DOOLEY

The piping plover represents a success story in species recovery.
(Times file photo)

PROVIDENCE, RI. - Eighty years ago, the American burying beetle disappeared from New England.

Reintroduced in 1994 on Nantucket and Penikese islands, more than 3,000 of the carrion-eating large beetles exist there today. Another 2,000 are on Block Island.

‘’It’s working,’’ Lou Perrotti, a Roger Williams Park Zoo zoologist, said yesterday. ‘’We’re actually doing it.’’

In the Northeast, stocks of humpback whales, Atlantic piping plovers and bald eagles also have increased, as have dozens of animals and plants listed under the Endangered Species Act.

It’s proof that the protection act is a success, said Melissa Waage, a policy analyst with the Center for Biological Diversity, a nonprofit conservation organization. The center released a report about the status of 56 endangered species from New Jersey to Maine yesterday at a press conference at the Providence zoo.

Passed into law in 1973, the act was created to prevent extinction and move species toward recovery and eventually off the list of the imperiled. Over time, 1,350 species of plants and wildlife have been added; 1,312 remain. Fourteen species have recovered.

Critics say that is a mere 1 percent success rate. Supporters counter that is a 99 percent success rate because few animals under federal protection have become extinct.

The study looks at species that have been listed, and their population growth or decline since being added.

It was the first comprehensive examination of species’ stocks; additional reports for other regions will be released this year.

Piping plover numbers have increased to more than 1,400 pairs nationally. In danger because they nest and feed on flats and near the busy water’s edge, the number of piping plovers in New England has surpassed a recovery goal for the region, with more than 600 pairs. Though increasing since 1986, the population is still under the total number required by the federal government.

The number of North Atlantic right whales, among the largest critically-endangered whales in the world, is also growing, according to the study.

It shows that the right whale population in the Gulf of Maine increased from 100 in the 1980s to 300 by the

late 1990s.

But not everyone agrees. ‘’None of our studies show they are growing at that level,’’ said Moira Brown, a New England Aquarium senior scientist in the right whale program.

The current estimate is between 300 and 325 whales and has been for some time.

‘’I think the Endangered Species Act has served its purpose well, but misinterpretation of it is not the best.’’

Waage said the center used the best data available for its study.

On average, the recovery plan for a species requires 42 years, but the typical species has been listed only 24 years. There is time to go before efforts can truly be proven, she said.

But changes may soon be coming to the Endangered Spec ies Act. An amended version passed by the House of Representatives and currently in Senate committee calls for a major overhaul.

‘’The act is working but the act itself appears to be in danger,’’ said Audubon Society of Rhode Island executive director Lawrence Taft

Sponsored by Republican Congressman Richard Pombo from California, the amended act gets rid of critical habitat designations, which allow federal regulators to impose strict rules, such as speed limits in areas where endangered species may be present.

Pombo’s committee says amending the act is necessary because the habitats contribute little protection and consume federal resources.

Hope for endangered species

Atlantic piping plover

Range: Found along Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to North Carolina, including ME, VT, RI, CT, MA, NY and NJ.

Year listed as threatened: 1985

Population: 659 pairs in New England (total of 1,423 pairs)

Humpback whale

Range: Found in all oceans of the world

Year listed as endangered: 1970

Population: Gulf of Maine - increased from 240 in 1986 to 647 in 1999; North Pacific - increased from 1,200 in 1966 to 6,000-8,000 in 1992

North Atlantic right whale

Range: Southeastern U.S. to Bay of Fundy

Year listed as endangered: 1979

Population: Estimated at several thousand in the early to mid-1600s; may have numbered fewer than 100 by 1935; currently at 350.

American burying beetle

Range: Formerly found across a vast range from Nova Scotia south to Florida, west to Texas and north to South Dakota. Now found in RI, MA, OK, SD, NE, KA, AR and TX. Was reintroduced on Nantucket and Penikese islands.

Year listed as endangered: 1989

Population: 5,000 adults in 2005 in the Northeast; historically could have numbered in the tens of millions.

Source: Center for Biological Diversity

THE BLOCK ISLAND TIMES Digital Edition

Study: Endangered Species Act effective

Atlantic piping plovers and American burying beetles making comebacks on Block Island

March 18, 2006 - Block Island, RI

By Jack Pippa

No endangered species in the Northeast has gone extinct since coming under federal protection, according to a study by an environmental group.

And the longer an animal or plant species is protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA), the more likely it is to recover, found a study by the Center for Biological Diversity in Tucson, Arizona.

Many will recognize the bald eagle as one of the most notable success stories for the ESA, soaring from 417 pairs in 1963 to 7,230 by 2003 in the lower 48 states. Last year 562 pairs ranged the Northeast, including Rhode Island.

Closer to home, the Atlantic piping plover and American burying beetle have also made comebacks. Programs for both animals are implemented on Block Island.

The study looked at 53 species in eight northeastern states: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York and New Jersey.

It found that the Endangered Species Act has been remarkably successful in the region.

Population numbers for 93 percent of species listed have stabilized or increased, says the study. Eighty-two percent are meeting or exceeding the timelines established by their federal recovery plans.

It is described as the first outside study of the EPA's effectiveness, and drew on federal, state and university research.

The Atlantic piping plover, a tiny beach dweller, is one of the featured species. When listed in 1985, the shorebird was at a low of 550 nesting pairs, but has since increased to 1,423 pairs.

It is now the most widely protected of the endangered species that inhabit Atlantic coast beaches. Protection plans for the piping plover have helped protect less well-known species, such as the seabeach amaranth and northeastern beach tiger beetle, says the study.

Corrie Heinz has walked Block Island's beaches for the past three years, keeping an eye out for piping plovers, which usually appear in April.

No pairs have managed to hatch eggs successfully so far, Heinz says; a nest with eggs was flooded out last year, and other nests have been abandoned. Heinz fences off sections of the beach to keep walkers away, and asks people to keep dogs on leashes.

The tiny, carrion-eating American burying beetle is Block Island's star endangered species.

The black-and-orange beetle, known as nature's embalmer, was listed in 1989. The beetle once ranged in at least 34 states, but is now absent from 90 percent of its historic range, "one of the most disastrous declines of an insect's range ever to be recorded," says the report.

Block Island has the last natural population east of the Mississippi, and the program here has helped support a captive breeding facility at the Roger Williams Park Zoo and recovery efforts on Nantucket and Penikese Island.

Scott Comings of The Nature Conservancy helps trap and tag beetles annually as part of a joint effort with the state Department of Environmental Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife. "They're beautiful," Comings says.

The beetle population is between 1,000 and 2,000, Comings says, and has been on the rise for the past few years, apparently in response to a new technique aimed at helping the

beetles breed. Comings and others dig a hole and put a dead quail inside with a captured male and female beetle. They then fill the hole back in. They help about 30 or 40 pairs a year this way, mimicking the beetle's natural reproductive cycle.

The beetles typically drag mid-range carrion underground and coat them in secretions to retard fungal and bacterial growth, says the study. "The beetles then mate and within 24 hours lay eggs in the soil near the carcass," it continues. "White grubs emerge three or four days later and are carried to the carcass. The parents defend the grubs from predators and feed them regurgitated food. In approximately a week, the grubs leave the chamber and pupate into adults.

"The American burying beetle is one of the few non-colonial insects in the world to practice dual parenting."

Many factors on Block Island probably contribute to the beetle's survival here, Comings says, including lower pesticide use, less light pollution, good habitat - they favor grassland or mature forest - and a lack of competition with scavengers like foxes and raccoons. Block Island's pheasant population may also provide carrion.

"It's always a little scary when you're dealing with a single population, and it's nice to have this one doing so well," Comings says.

Nationwide, the beetle is doing well enough that, if trends continue, it might be reclassified in 2012, the study says.

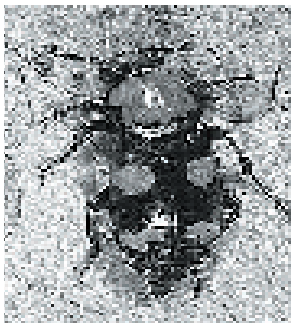
More than 1,300 species are listed under the ESA, which was created in 1973.

This study comes at a time of political upheaval for the EPA. A California legislator is leading an effort to overhaul the act, charging that too few of the listed species have recovered, and that the law unfairly burdens property owners.

Less than 1 percent of the endangered species put on the list since 1973 have recovered enough to be taken off, critics say.

The Center for Biological Diversity study counters that, on average, species will take 42 years to reach recovery levels, and so criticizing the EPA now is premature.

For example, the northern red-bellied cooter, a small pond turtle found in southern Massachusetts, was down to 300 in 1985 but now numbers 3,000. Although the cooter has been on the list for 20 years, the 1/2rst hatchlings have been breeding for only 1/2ve years. A cooter begins to breed at age 14.



American Burying Beetle

The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

MARCH 1, 2006

Endangered Species Act Under Discussion

By JON BRODKIN

Framingham, MA. - Environmentalists concerned about a congressional attempt to weaken the Endangered Species Act gathered at Garden in the Woods yesterday to discuss a new report detailing the law's success protecting plants and animals in the Northeast.

A bill pending in Congress would eliminate critical habitat protections, reduce oversight of pesticides and give polluting industries a role in species recovery planning, according to Peter Galvin, a Framingham native who is director of conservation at the Center for Biological Diversity.

"It would...in a variety of different ways put the fox in charge of guarding the henhouse," Galvin said yesterday. "Unfortunately, it's a polluters' dream bill. They've bought and paid for their congressmen and they got their bill."

The bill was approved by the U.S. House of Representatives last September after being introduced by Rep. Richard Pombo of California, who said the Endangered Species Act "has failed to recover endangered species while conflict and litigation have plagued local communities and private property owners alike."

But environmentalists say the Endangered Species Act has successfully protected dwindling plant and animal species despite limited financial support from the government.

Yesterday at Garden in the Woods, the Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity released a report that found 93 percent of endangered species in New England, New York and New Jersey have maintained or increased their populations under the federal law's protection.

The analysis is based on 41 species for which good data is available, out of a total of 53 federally listed endangered plants and animals, Galvin said.

Of the 41 species, two-thirds have improved under Endangered Species Act oversight, and 27 percent remained stable.

Nineteen of 29 Massachusetts species have improved, including the bald eagle, American peregrine falcon and blue whale.

The fact that no species has gone extinct that's been protected under the Act...is a resounding success," Galvin said.

Galvin said the Senate has not taken up the endangered species bill, but may do so within the next few months.

Massachusetts has gone even further than the federal law in protecting endangered species, said William Brumback, conservation director of the New England Wild Flower Society, which operates Garden in the Woods in Framingham.

"Massachusetts has one of the strongest endangered species acts in the country. It does go beyond the federal act because it protects plants on private land, which the federal act (does not do)," Brumback said.

Yesterday's meeting included presentations by several groups working to protect endangered species. Chelsea Gwyther, executive director of the Connecticut River Watershed Council, discussed how hydroelectric dams in the river and tributaries prevent migratory fish from reaching nesting ground.

"It's amazing that any of our migratory fish are able to spawn at all," Gwyther said. "Almost all of the endangered or threatened species in the Connecticut watershed are impacted in some way by dams."

The DAILY NEWS TRIBUNE

MARCH 1, 2006 - Waltham, MA

Endangered Species Act Under Discussion

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