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A Brighter Future for Hundreds of U.S. Species



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The future of hundreds of America's most iconic and imperiled plants and animals just got considerably brighter.

The Obama administration signed a landmark agreement with the Center for Biological Diversity that, combined with a previous agreement, will propel 757 species toward protection under the Endangered Species Act.

The deal touches species in every corner of the nation: the walrus and yellow-billed loon in Alaska, fisher and golden trout on the West Coast, wolverine and sage grouse in the Northern Rockies, gray wolf and pygmy owl in the Southwest, Eastern massasauga rattlesnake and Arkansas darter in the Midwest, New England cottontail and long-eared bat in the Northeast, Miami blue butterfly and Alabama map turtle in the Southeast, and the colorful scarlet Hawaiian honeycreeper.

It also includes 403 fresh-water species in the Southeast, 42 tiny springsnails in Nevada's Great Basin and 32 mollusks in the Pacific Northwest. These plants and animals are dangerously close to extinction and will now get a fighting chance at survival.

The agreement reached Tuesday caps a decade-long campaign by the Center for Biological Diversity to save 1,000 of America's most endangered, least protected species. Over the years, the Center wrote scientific listing petitions and/or filed litigation to protect all 757.

The deal sets legally binding deadlines between now and 2018 for the government to make protection decisions on species in all 50 states.

It's a watershed moment for the Endangered Species Act, America's foremost tool for protecting plants and animals facing the grim prospect of disappearing forever. Signed in 1973, the Act has a long record of success -- think of where bald eagles, grizzly bears, gray wolves and peregrine falcons would be without it.

But the Act only works for species that actually arrive on the endangered species list. And, for many imperiled species, the wait has simply been too long. (At least 24 species that were put on the "waiting list" for protection have gone extinct while they waited.)

Although today there are about 1,300 species protected under the Endangered Species Act, more species need help. Habitat destruction, climate change, pollution, human overpopulation and a host of other factors continue to push some of this country's most vulnerable species to the brink.

This historic agreement will not only put hundreds of species on the fast-track toward protection, it will protect the wild places, clean water and clean air we all need to survive.

