

Texas Sure Seems Hellbent on Killing Off the Endangered Prairie Chicken

By Amy Silverstein
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Should libtards keep giving government handouts to species that can't acclimate to Texas' business-friendly atmosphere?

Take prairie chickens. They once roamed Texas' prairies and are known for an awesome mating ritual that includes a funny little dance and a "strange, booming sound across a sea of grasses." Those prairies are mostly gone, and the chickens are dying with them. Some politically correct folks want the chickens to be placed on the federal endangered species list.

But that idea is being contested by Texas politicians, who say that dying animals are getting in the way of free enterprise.

On Monday, state Senator Ken Paxton, who is seeking the Republican nomination for Texas attorney general, vowed to fight adding any species to the federal endangered species list in cases



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

where doing so "could adversely impact drilling, farming and other industries."

Attorney General Greg Abbott has also framed the the EPA's endangered species list as another federal government intrusion in the states. He promises that if he becomes governor, he will prioritize Texas' "oil renaissance" over the protections of any endangered animal.

And Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson, who is now running for lieutenant governor, has been especially blunt. He's not afraid to call out "endangered species" for the sissies that they really are: "critters that probably ought to die anyway."

Patterson reportedly made his remarks at a luncheon in Houston this fall. He was directing his anger at the prairie chickens, lizards and salamanders whose habitats are at an inconvenient spot in West Texas where companies want to drill.

We asked a few conservation groups to weigh in on the validity of Patterson's scientific thesis.

"There aren't any species anywhere that ought to die," says Janice Bezanson, the executive director of the Texas Conservation Alliance.

Andrew Wexler, director of the wildlife conservation program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, tries to argue on behalf of the dying critters by appealing to our selfish desires, things that American humans want. "The vast majority of Americans believe that we need to care for the world, including all the creatures that live in it, and we do so not just for our children's sake but our own sake. Animals and plants often provide incredibly important benefits to people."

To save the prairie chickens, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last week proposed a rule that would seem to please both the anti-federal government folks and people who would like to not kill off other species. Under a draft plan, industries will have to pay landowners who make an effort to save the prairie chicken habitat. In exchange for the funds, the company will be shielded from punishment if it accidentally kills a few birds.

The point of such a compromise is to keep the chickens off of the stricter federal endangered species list without just killing them all outright. "If we can pull this off, I can guarantee it will be an unprecedented attempt to avoid listing this bird," Matt Wagner, deputy director of the wildlife division of Texas Parks and Wildlife, told the Lubbock-Avalanche Journal.

While that sounds nice, the Center for Biological Diversity has come out swinging against the proposed compromise. Among the conservationist group's concerns: The population goal for prairie chickens and the amount of natural habitat to be preserved is too small, and the rule "offers no reasonable expectation of enforcement to ensure survival and recovery."

Sure, the plan is voluntary, but maybe it will teach the prairie chickens how to negotiate with big business and stand up for themselves, rather than just hiding behind federal authorities when things get tough.