

Endangered Facts:

Sen. Inhofe's Attack on the Endangered Species Act

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The nation's climate-denier-in chief, Oklahoma Sen. James Inhofe, has apparently found a new target for his anti-science agenda: the Endangered Species Act.

At a hearing last week, Inhofe recycled all the Tea Party tropes about the Act, including that it doesn't save species (it's saved 99 percent), is run by environmental groups (wrong again) and is unpopular (poll after poll says otherwise).

Of course what Inhofe failed to mention -- how does he always forget to say this? -- is that he's one of the biggest recipients of campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry, some \$1.7 million since 1989, including more than \$100,000 just from the Koch brothers.

And do you know what's funny? It's the oil and gas industry and other profiteers often leading the charge (or footing the bill) against efforts to protect wolves, sage grouse, grizzly bears and other wildlife whose survival depends on the Endangered Species Act.

Inhofe, never shy about attacking science and the environment, rolled out some doozies during a recent hearing of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, he now chairs (I won't even get into that irony).

The hearing included eight bills attacking the Endangered Species Act, including one that would strip federal protections for more than 800 species. Here are a few Inhofe's greatest misses:

- **INHOFISM:** The Endangered Species Act is "not successful" because only 12 species have been delisted for recovery.
- **FACT:** Actually, 23 species have been delisted for recovery, including such well known success stories as the bald eagle and gray whale. Hundreds more species have seen tremendous improvement with protection and are on the road to recovery. The Endangered Species Act has been more than 99 percent successful in preventing extinction of species under its protection.
- **INHOFISM:** The American burying beetle is now found in areas where it was not present when protected - including Oklahoma -- and does not need to be listed. "They didn't used to be here" but now they are "everywhere," and now every farmer, driller, and rancher lives in constant fear of not being able to use their land.

- **FACT:** The recovery of the American burying beetle to places where it was not found prior to listing vividly illustrates the Act's power to recover species. In fact, the beetle's historic range used to be throughout the Eastern U.S.-stretching from the Great Plains to the Atlantic Coast and definitely including Oklahoma. At the time its Recovery Plan was issued in 1991, only two populations existed across 35 states. Since then, thanks to the protections of the Act, it has expanded to numerous populations and occupies the eastern third of Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

- **INHOFISM:** The ESA went from a "well intentioned" law "to one that is dictated by special interest environmental groups."

- **FACT:** Polls indicate two of every three Americans support protecting endangered species. An overwhelming majority of the American public can hardly be called a "special interest." Rather, what is a special interest, is the gargantuan amount of campaign funding that James Inhofe has received from the oil and gas industry. Three out of five of his top contributors were oil and gas, petroleum, and development companies- including Koch Industries and Murray Energy.

It was quite a performance.

Thankfully, endangered species have a champion in California Democrat, Sen. Barbara Boxer, who told Inhofe during the hearing that the Republicans "back-door" efforts to gut the Endangered Species Act aren't fooling anyone, that if we took the advice coming from the Republican side of the aisle, "We never would've saved the bald eagle."

Boxer closed by saying that if Inhofe and his colleagues were looking for a fight on the nation's most-revered conservation law, "we'll do hand-to-hand combat on the floor Senate."

Maybe it's time for him to find a new hobby.