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# Trump rolls back endangered species protections

By [Rebecca Beitsch](#) - 08/12/19 11:03 AM EDT [1,526](#)

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The Trump administration on Monday announced it has finalized a controversial rollback of protections for endangered species, including allowing economic factors to be weighed before adding an animal to the list.

The Interior Department regulations would dramatically scale back America's landmark conservation law, limiting protections for threatened species, how factors like climate change can be factored in listing decisions and the review process used before projects are approved on their habitat.

"It means that in all likelihood that the federal government itself and individuals will be damaging the habitat and likely increase the timetable and likelihood of a species going extinct," David Hayes, executive director of the State Energy and Environmental Impact Center and a former deputy of Interior, said in a previous interview with The Hill.

Going forward, the Endangered Species Act will no longer offer the same protections for threatened species — those at risk of becoming extinct in the foreseeable future — as those that are already endangered.

**"These changes crash a bulldozer through the Endangered Species Act's lifesaving protections for America's most vulnerable wildlife," Noah Greenwald, the Center for Biological Diversity's endangered species director, said in a statement.**

Monday's rule finalizes an [earlier proposal](#) from the Interior Department and prompted threats of lawsuits from many environmental groups who say the changes will gut the law.

The Endangered Species Act, first passed in 1973, is considered a success globally, surpassing protections for flora and fauna in many other countries. Environmentalists see it as one of America's premier environmental laws.

But in the U.S it has been a target of industry, heavily criticized by some developers and lawmakers for working almost too well, making it difficult to encroach on habitat even once a species rebounds. Many would like species to be more easily removed from the list.

Interior described the new regulation as a modernization of the act "designed to increase transparency and effectiveness and bring the administration of the Act into the 21st century," the agency said in a press release.

But environmentalists argue many of Interior's changes will weaken protections for threatened and endangered species.

One big change from the administration is how far in the future it will look to determine how at risk a species is of becoming threatened or extinct. Critics say such a move will stop Interior from considering how climate change will impact vulnerable species.

"We will look out into the future so far as we can reliably predict and not speculate," Gary Frazer, the associate director for endangered species at the Fish and Wildlife Service said in a call with reporters. "This might be climate-induced changes in a physical environment."

Though whether to list a species as threatened or endangered would still have to be a science-based decision, the economic impacts of a decision could also be shared publicly.

That could include how protecting a species or its habitat might hinder the operations of the oil and gas industry, foresters and many other operations that work on or near federal lands.

Hayes said the Endangered Species Act specifically bars such economic factors from being considered.

"We can expect if this goes final and if the court allows this to happen that industry will feed all kinds of sky is falling economic projections to the Fish and Wildlife Service and that information would be released at the same time a listing is proposed," Hayes said. "The reason for it is obviously to influence the decision."

The announcement was hailed by a number of industry groups, ranging from oil and gas companies to utilities and ranchers.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association referred to the decision as "long-awaited regulatory relief," while the American Petroleum Institute said it would lead to "the reduction of duplicative and unnecessary regulations that ultimately bog down conservation efforts."

*Updated: 12:31 p.m.*