

ENDANGERED **EARTH**



CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY • FALL 2025

NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAIN WOLVES

Get Another Shot at Protection

Wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains don't have it easy when it comes to avoiding hunters, trappers, and agency officials taking drastic measures to reduce their population.

But they caught an important break this summer when a federal judge in Montana ruled that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service broke the law when it denied a 2021 petition to protect them again under the Endangered Species Act.

The ruling requires the agency to reconsider whether to grant protection to wolves living in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, along with portions of Washington, Oregon and Utah. It's an important win that could finally pave the way for wolf recovery.

As you might recall, wolves in the northern Rockies lost protection under the Endangered Species Act via a congressional rider in 2011. The rider excluded Wyoming, but in 2017 Wyoming wolves also lost federal protection following a judicial ruling.

Once those federal protections were lost, states made no secret of their intentions to annihilate the wolf population, increasing year-by-year directives to kill wolves by nearly any means possible.

State legislatures authorized the killing of thousands of wolves, including via baited traps, strangulation snares, and the use of all-terrain vehicles and specialized equipment to hunt them at night. Montana and Idaho even approved bounty programs offering "reimbursements" for costs incurred in killing wolves.

States clearly weren't ready to responsibly manage wolves, so in 2021 the Center and allies petitioned to restore Endangered Species Act protection. The government denied the petition last year, and we sued. We're hopeful that the court's ruling this summer will push the states to do better for wolves, but we'll continue to fight to secure federal protection for them again.

The judge's decision was significant in another way. He rightly found that the Fish and Wildlife Service can't just look at whether a species is recovered in its current range but has to include places where the species once lived. It's an important decision that could mean more endangered species will be allowed to recover across more of their historic range.



Andrea Zaccardi is the legal director of the Center's Carnivore Conservation program.

Protections (Finally) Proposed for 'Pinecones With Legs'

It's hard not to have a crush on pangolins. They're the world's only scaly mammals (sometimes described as pinecones with legs); have long, sticky tongues perfect for slurping up ants and termites; and curl into an adorable ball when frightened.

But the cuteness has a dark backstory.

Pangolins are the most trafficked wild mammals in the world, pursued and sold for their scales, which are used in traditional medicine, and their meat. It's come at a terrible price: All species of pangolin — four in Asia and four in Africa — are in grave danger of extinction.

That's why it was a relief this summer that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed protecting seven species of pangolins as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. (The eighth species is already protected.)

The proposal responds to a petition the Center and allies filed back in 2015 and a subsequent legal agreement in 2020 requiring the agency to make a decision. Help can't come soon enough for these declining creatures of the forests and grasslands.

While pangolins received certain commercial trade protections under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in 2017 and seizures have declined, trafficking and trade continue.

In April Nigerian authorities seized nearly 4 tons of trafficked pangolin scales, which represent about 2,000 pangolins killed. An Indonesian raid in November 2024 found 1.2 tons of scales being trafficked. And U.S. demand continues. The most recent publicly available data shows that U.S. border officials seized 76 shipments of pangolin parts between 2016 and 2020, including scales and medicinal products.

If finalized, listing all pangolins as endangered would prohibit the import and interstate sale of pangolin parts in the United States, except for scientific or other conservation purposes. Listing would also heighten global awareness about pangolins and the threats they face and potentially make funding available for anti-trafficking and habitat-conservation efforts.



Sarah Uhlemann is the Center's international director.

RESCIND THE ROADLESS RULE? Here's what to know.

The Trump administration is gearing up to rescind a landmark 2001 policy called the Roadless Area Conservation Rule — a move that would open nearly 45 million acres of wild, unfragmented national forests to road construction, logging, and other development — imperiling endangered species, fouling precious water, and raising wildfire risk.



Randi Spivak is the Center's public lands policy director.

Why is this proposal so dangerous?

This would be the single-largest evisceration of public lands protection in American history, affecting roadless areas in national forests across 37 states. These spectacular areas protect drinking water, wildlife habitat, waterways, and recreation. Once you start punching roads into them, allowing wide-scale logging and industrial operations, there's really no going back.

Why are these roadless areas important for wildlife?

Roadless forests are the beating heart of biodiversity — places where the wild can still be wild, where bears can be bears and salmon can be salmon. Forest areas free of roads and logging provide crucial and connected habitat for species and protect them from noise, pollution, and human pressure deep into the quiet backcountry. These places are home to scores of threatened and endangered species, including American wolverines, gray wolves, Canada lynx, grizzly bears, Quino checkerspot butterflies, and northern spotted owls. Rescinding the rule would not only push these species closer to extinction but threaten countless others, including Alexander Archipelago wolves and Queen Charlotte goshawks.

What about the climate?

Many roadless areas contain mature and old-growth forests, which absorb and store vast amounts of carbon that help mitigate climate change. Logging and processing releases most of that stored carbon. With the climate crisis ramping up, this is exactly the wrong moment to cut these important trees down.

What about water supplies?

National forests are the headwaters of the country's great rivers and the largest source of U.S. municipal water supplies, serving more than 60 million people in 33 states. Because the Roadless Rule protects many headwaters from roads — a major cause of water pollution — the rule is important for maintaining clean drinking water.

What about wildfires?

Roads increase human-caused wildfires: Research shows that from 1992 to 2024, wildfires were four times as likely in areas with roads than in roadless forest tracts. Another study showed that more than 90% of all U.S. wildfires happened within half a mile of a road, caused by things like unattended campfires or sparks from a vehicle.

Will it save taxpayers money?

Bulldozing more roads in national forests would be a drain on taxpayers. Even with the Roadless Rule in place, the U.S. Forest Service has a 370,000-mile road system — twice as long as the nation's highway system — crisscrossing national forests. The Forest Service can't afford to maintain the roads it has, so there's a massive maintenance and repair backlog that has ballooned to billions of dollars. If the Roadless Rule is rescinded, taxpayers would be stuck footing the bill for any new roads built in backcountry forests.

Doesn't the Roadless Rule have widespread support?

Yes. The rule is a very popular policy that's often celebrated as one of America's most successful conservation measures. Before its enactment, 1.6 million Americans called for protection of roadless forests at more than 600 public hearings nationwide.

What's next?

We expect a formal proposal from the Trump administration in early 2026, followed by a chance for the public to have its say. This will be one of the most important fights over public lands in decades, and we'll need everyone's help to make sure this dangerous policy never gets put in place.

5 Species We're Fighting for Right Now



Across the country and beyond, we're pushing to protect the animals and plants that need it most. Here are some of our latest actions:



Dixie Cavern salamanders are found in just three cave locations in Virginia's Roanoke County — and all of them are threatened by deforestation, development, disease and climate change. These slender salamanders, who breathe through their bodies, have white and brassy flecks along their dark bodies. They've been in decline for decades. We've petitioned to protect them under the Endangered Species Act.



LeConte's thrashers, native to arid desert habitats, have lost nearly 70% of their U.S. population over the past 50 years, primarily because of destructive development and other habitat degradation in Southern California, Nevada and Arizona. These are secretive, adaptable birds, but they can't cope with pervasive urban sprawl and rapid climate change that's destroying their habitat. We've petitioned to protect them under the Act.



The **cusk** is a bottom-dwelling marine fish that lives in the North Atlantic Ocean and is threatened by warming waters, habitat loss and being accidentally caught in fishing nets aimed at other species. Surveys show that the cusk's population has declined by up to 95% in several areas over the past few decades. We've petitioned to protect the species under the Act.



Known for their red, black and cream-colored checkered wings, **Quino checkerspot butterflies** were once easily spotted throughout Southern California. But sprawl, climate change, pollution, invasive species and border-wall construction continue to threaten the species' survival. After a petition by the Center and allies, they're now a candidate for protection under state law, granting them protection as the state conducts further review.



Overseas, in response to a Center petition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed protection for **earless monitor lizards**, extremely rare residents of Borneo. They're known for their dragon-like appearance, translucent eyelids and characteristic lack of an external ear opening. There are just five known subpopulations, all believed to be small and declining.

A BLANK CHECK to Contaminate Waters, Wetlands

Amid all the Trump administration's assaults on wildlife and the environment, it'd be easy to overlook a wonky filing in June by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The agency's "Proposal to Reissue and Modify Nationwide Permits" may sound like a recipe for curing insomnia, but it'll be a nightmare for our freshwater systems if it's enacted.

Sensitive wetlands, rivers and streams — teeming with birds, fish, frogs, snakes and insects — rely on government rules to keep them free from pollution. The Army Corps of Engineers, through its permitting system, plays a crucial role, and it's about to issue a blank check to industry to contaminate more waters and wetlands.

The Corps' latest proposal aims to expand the scope of the "nationwide permits" program even more than before, allowing broad categories of activities to proceed with minimal oversight and bypassing necessary environmental reviews.

If enacted it would allow hundreds of thousands of discharges of dredged or fill material into the nation's waters and wetlands. This is waste from a wide range of industrial activities, including oil and gas development, pipeline construction, coal mining, residential and commercial development, and commercial aquaculture.

Despite the huge potential for major environmental damage, the Corps is reauthorizing the program without fulfilling the basic reviews required by the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act, putting vulnerable ecosystems, wildlife and critical habitats at risk.

It couldn't come at a worse time.

A new international report finds that 22% of the world's wetlands have been lost since 1970 — and another 20% of the remaining wetlands are at risk of disappearing by midcentury without immediate action. We know that 41% of amphibians are at risk of extinction and freshwater biodiversity is declining at twice the rate of that of oceans and forests.

The Center and our allies, of course, are fighting this hard. Stay tuned for how you can help.



Margaret Townsend is a senior freshwater attorney in the Endangered Species program.

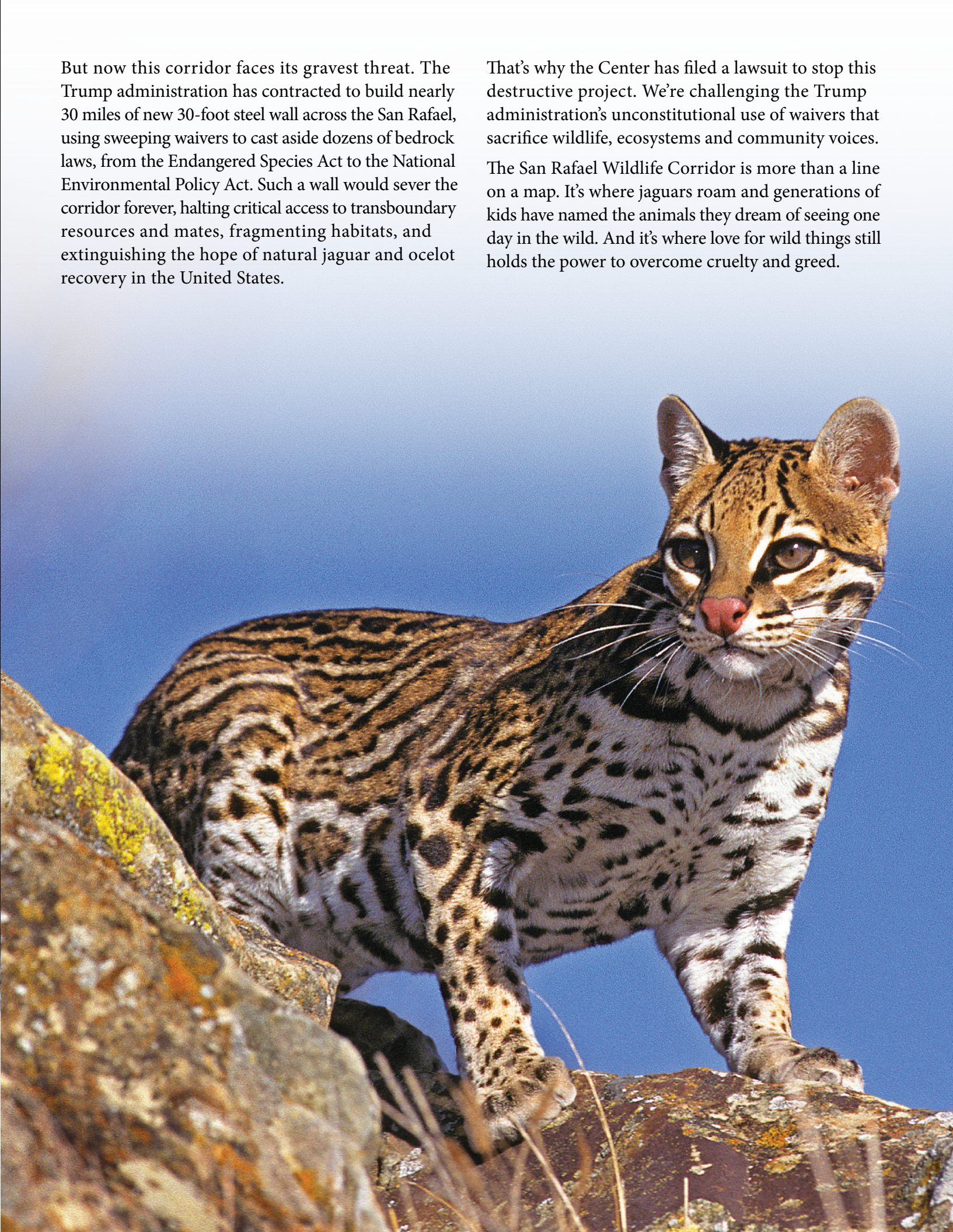


The Fight for Jaguars, Ocelots and Biodiversity in Arizona's San Rafael Wildlife Corridor

Last July one of my trail cameras in Arizona's San Rafael Wildlife Corridor captured a video I'll never forget: a wild ocelot sipping from a mountain spring. For me it was proof that the corridor pulses with wild possibility. The San Rafael Valley, famous for its role in the movie version of the Broadway musical *Oklahoma*, is a sweeping grassland of pronghorns, badgers, deer, javelinas and porcupines. It also serves as a corridor to the dramatic rise of four spectacular Sky Island Mountains, where oak woodlands, deep canyons and pine forests sustain jaguars, ocelots, mountain lions, black bears, coatis and countless birds. Few places on Earth hold such outrageous biodiversity. For endangered cats, this corridor is irreplaceable. It's been home to some of the most important jaguar detections in U.S. history — El Jefe, Yo'oko and O:shad N'u:kudam (jaguar protector), named by more than a thousand members of the Tohono O'odham Nation. Just this summer, O:shad was detected five separate times in the corridor, proof of how vital this pathway remains. At the Center we've worked to connect people to these cats as deeply as the land itself by helping facilitate students' and Tribes' naming of each of these individuals and to see the health of jaguars as linked to the health of their communities.

But now this corridor faces its gravest threat. The Trump administration has contracted to build nearly 30 miles of new 30-foot steel wall across the San Rafael, using sweeping waivers to cast aside dozens of bedrock laws, from the Endangered Species Act to the National Environmental Policy Act. Such a wall would sever the corridor forever, halting critical access to transboundary resources and mates, fragmenting habitats, and extinguishing the hope of natural jaguar and ocelot recovery in the United States.

That's why the Center has filed a lawsuit to stop this destructive project. We're challenging the Trump administration's unconstitutional use of waivers that sacrifice wildlife, ecosystems and community voices. The San Rafael Wildlife Corridor is more than a line on a map. It's where jaguars roam and generations of kids have named the animals they dream of seeing one day in the wild. And it's where love for wild things still holds the power to overcome cruelty and greed.



Russ McSpadden is a Southwest conservation advocate.

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Ringed Seals Keep Protection

We're celebrating an important court victory for Arctic ringed seals. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has upheld a rejection of the state of Alaska's petition to strip the ice seals of protection under the Endangered Species Act. We've been fighting for this species for a long time, so we're relieved by the court's decision.

Ringed seals give birth in snow caves built on sea ice. Climate change is reducing Arctic snowpack, causing caves to collapse and leaving pups vulnerable to death by freezing or from predators. The Arctic is warming almost four times faster than the rest of the planet.

The Center originally petitioned the National Marine Fisheries Service to protect the seals under the Endangered Species Act in 2008. The agency did so in 2012, and the 9th Circuit upheld the listing in 2018 — despite objections from the state of Alaska, the oil industry, and others. Then the state, the North Slope Borough, and several groups petitioned to delist the species.

The Fisheries Service denied that delisting petition under the first Trump administration, and the petitioners challenged that decision in federal court in Alaska in late 2022. The Center intervened in the case, which ultimately found its way to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and the positive ruling this summer.

The science is overwhelmingly clear that climate change is threatening the seals' existence. The court rightly recognized there's no scientific or legal reason for Alaska's cruel attempt to strip away safeguards these seals need to survive our rapidly heating world.

Our persistence will pay off for these ice seals. Endangered Species Act listing offers them increased protection from oil and gas development, as well as against the greenhouse gas emissions that are driving climate change. Listing of the seals doesn't affect subsistence harvest of the species by Alaska Natives.



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From the Director: EPIC FIGHTS AHEAD

The Trump administration's cueing up historic, horrific assaults on nature — including many of our most vulnerable species — and we're preparing to meet them head on every step of the way. These are more than typical swipes at laws like the Endangered Species Act. This administration is emboldened and brimming with callous cruelty, so we're girding for wholesale attacks aimed at the heart of wildlife protections.

We've already seen the administration propose to strip away nearly all habitat protections from endangered species. This would allow industries to mine, log, bulldoze, pollute, and otherwise destroy some of the last homes of Florida panthers, eastern hellbenders, Chinook salmon, manatees, and so many more.

Just weeks ago the administration proposed to rescind the nation's Roadless Rule, opening nearly 45 million acres of wild, unfragmented national forest to road construction, logging, and other development.

It would be the single-largest evisceration of public lands protections in American history. Forest areas that are now free of roads and logging offer crucial refuge and habitat connectivity to more than 500 imperiled species, from grizzly bears and wolves in the Pacific Northwest to migratory songbirds in the Appalachian Mountains.

And it's clear that the Endangered Species Act will come under further fire. Anti-wildlife zealots have been waiting for years to tear the Act apart and make it far harder to protect animals and plants from extinction.

We also expect them to gut nearly all safeguards for wildlife newly designated as "threatened." That would be devastating for species like monarch butterflies, whose population recently declined. Monarchs could be designated as "threatened" later this year, but that won't come with any meaningful protection if Trump gets his way.

Pushing back against these disastrous proposals will take an epic effort by the Center: tough, nimble, laser-focused, and uncompromising. Saving life on Earth requires nothing less.

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Kieran Suckling".

Kieran Suckling
Executive Director





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