MORE MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT CRITICAL HABITAT AND THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

MYTH: Critical habitat designation is an economic burden for landowners and communities.

FACT: The dragonfly’s habitat is likely to have enormous economic benefits for the region, and the destruction of these habitats are drastically affecting our quality of life. The dragonfly is a wetland dependant species, and wetlands provide enormous economic benefits in terms of waterfowl habitat, water quality for drinking water and the Great Lakes themselves, and recreational opportunities. The destruction of these habitats through urban sprawl eliminates valuable open space and the rural and wild character of these areas.

The Bush Administration has no support for its contrary statements. In response to a FOIA request submitted by the Center for Biological Diversity, the Bush Administration admitted that it has no documentation or support for its statements that denigrate the importance of critical habitat. Indeed, the GAO recently reviewed a critical habitat determination and determined that the designation resulted in a net benefit to the economy of millions of dollars.

MYTH: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does not have the budget to designate critical habitat.

FACT: The Bush Administration has deliberately under-funded these programs in a political attempt to avoid ESA protections. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stated in 2003 that they need a multi-year budget of $153 million to address the backlog of endangered species listings and critical habitat designations. However, the Bush Administration instead requested only $12.3 million in 2003 and $17.2 million in 2004, despite the fact that Congress has appropriated the Administration’s entire budget request in the past. Indeed, in 2003 Congress explicitly asked the Administration to increase its budget request, but the Bush Administration refused the invitation.

Rather than requesting the amount the administration knows is necessary to fund the protection programs, the Bush administration only requests the bare minimum necessary to cover protection actions mandated by courts, so that no money will be left over to protect recently imperiled species.
The Bush Administration has not been shy in requesting and spending money: it has never vetoed a single appropriations bill, and the budget deficit is at a record high. The problem is not lack of funding, but the lack of political will to appropriate the modest amounts necessary to fund the Act. Courts have begun to recognize this and have found that the Administration’s alleged budget crisis is a crisis “of its own making.”

**MYTH:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is unable to designate critical habitat because its resources are tied up with court-ordered actions from citizen law suits.

**FACT:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is indeed being forced by the courts to address a number of threatened and endangered species. However, this is because the Bush Administration has failed to implement protections of the ESA. The Bush Administration has the lowest endangered species listing rate in history—listing an average of 8.3 species annually, compared to 65 per year under Clinton, and 58 per year under George H.W. Bush. The Bush administration is the only presidency in the history of the ESA to have not listed a single species except in response to petitions and/or lawsuits by scientists and environmental groups. Furthermore, the Bush administration has reduced the size of 92% of critical habitat designations proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (by an average of 76%), has withdrawn two dozen previously designated critical habitats totaling 16.4 million acres, and has not designated a single new critical habitat except under court order.