

Tuesday, September 24, 2019

The Honorable Paul A. Gosar, DDS
Congressional Western Caucus
Chairman
2057 Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Gosar:

On behalf of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), I write to express our support for the Congressional Western Caucus' efforts to improve the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. The proposed legislative package would modernize the Act to enhance conservation of wildlife while providing more regulatory certainty for our members.

NRECA represents our nation's not-for profit, consumer-owned electric cooperatives that provide power to 42 million people across 56 percent of the nation's landmass. NRECA's members provide electricity to nearly every American landscape and ecosystem. Electric cooperatives seek to make the ESA more efficient, effective, and less costly. NRECA supports solutions like those presented today, that are able to find the right balance between costs and environmental protections to ensure reliable and affordable electricity, which is vital to the economic health of the communities' co-ops serve.

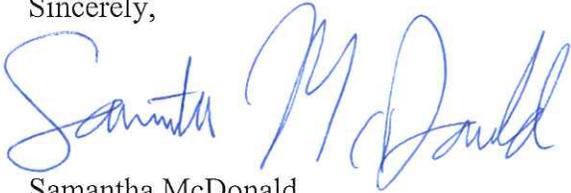
That balance is increasingly difficult to achieve as ESA implementation has become cumbersome, challenging, and uncertain. Once a species is listed, ESA compliance can seriously impact the ability of electric cooperatives to site and maintain power lines and other electric infrastructure. When a protected species or its habitat is adversely affected by an activity, such as building transmission lines, it is a "take" that requires the acquisition of an expensive and time-intensive incidental take permit, enrollment in a conservation plan, or in some cases, total avoidance of critical habitat. Therefore, ESA listings can adversely affect essential economic activities in parts of rural America.

Despite the many challenges that the ESA has presented to co-ops, NRECA's members still want to engage in voluntary conservation. For example, NRECA has been proud to help promote habitat for one of America's most iconic species, the Monarch Butterfly. NRECA is working to finalize a candidate conservation agreement with assurances with a consortium of allied interests. Once the agreement is formally approved, co-ops will be eligible to enroll, and their efforts will demonstrate that voluntary conservation can and does work.

America's electric co-ops are committed to protecting our nation's resources, while providing safe, reliable, and affordable power to America's diverse rural landscape. We thank the Caucus for promoting effective wildlife management legislation that will help us achieve these important

goals. NRECA and its members look forward to working with you to advance these bills through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Samantha McDonald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Samantha McDonald
Legislative Affairs Director