

Opening Statement
Congressional Western Caucus Chairman Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S
9/24/19 Endangered Species Act Modernization Member & Stakeholder
Roundtable, Press Opportunity, and Draft Legislation Rollout
Tuesday, September 24, 2019 | Roundtable 2:00-3:30p.m. | Senate Visitors Center
Room 212-10 | Press opportunity following the Roundtable from 3:30-3:45p.m.

Good afternoon everyone and thank you for coming. We'd like to get started promptly as we have a tight schedule and many speakers.

I want to take a minute to recognize all of the stakeholders we have in attendance who have been very generous with their time and resources in order to be here today. We have participants that flew all the way from California, Colorado, Idaho, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Tennessee, and the State of Washington.

Really means a lot that all of you are sitting here with us at the table as we hear personal stories and discuss how best to modernize the Endangered Species Act in order to benefit species and the American people.

Our roundtable with real people impacted by ESA listings in a nice contrast to the hearing currently being held by the Natural Resources Democrats that seeks to move the country backwards by repealing three new regulations just implemented by the Trump Administration. The Democrats' two main witnesses are from Earth Justice and Defenders of Wildlife, left-wing environmental groups that are more interested in filing frivolous litigation in order to prop up their extremist organizations than they are in doing constructive things that actually help species.

I am excited about the Western Caucus package for the 116th Congress which currently comprises 19 draft bills. Discussion drafts and summaries of these new ideas were unveiled today on the Western Caucus website. This package includes 6 bills that were included in our package last Congress, 3 other bills from Western Caucus members offered last Congress, seeks to codify the 3 regulations recently finalized by the Trump Administration, and has 7 new draft bills that I am really thrilled with including legislation that would protect private property rights, encourage voluntary conservation, improve forest health in order to protect species and local communities, increase multiple use activities and protect critical infrastructure.

While we are still finalizing many of these new bills and concepts and don't plan to introduce them for another couple months, we wanted to put them out there to stimulate a discussion and get your feedback.

Last Congress, we had over 170 groups and stakeholders across the U.S. support our entire ESA modernization package and we look forward to having even more this year.

The ESA impacts every community across this country and the people in this room live in or represent most of those communities.

And to be perfectly honest with you, you all *deserve* a say and a seat at the table. The people in this room have centuries of combined experience of interaction with the ESA, and with such long exposure are very familiar with the Act and its many gaps, oversights and overreaches.

I want to just give a few examples of some ridiculous cases we are seeing across the country regarding the ESA.

A rural electric cooperative in Utah had to spend over \$150,000 to airlift transmission poles over federal lands designated for prairie dogs, despite private landowners being able to obtain permits to kill the same prairie dogs on nearby lands.

Another example is the endangered Desert Tortoise. The tortoise has been listed since 1990, with many being housed in a \$1 million conservation center in Nevada. Once available funds for the facility decreased, the US Fish and Wildlife Service began killing hundreds of tortoises, rather than finding alternative means of conservation. According to the species recovery coordinator "It's the lesser of two evils, but it's still evil".

Ludicrous examples like these are one of the main reasons we are here today. It is clear that the ESA is not working and needs to be updated for the betterment of endangered species, industry, and the general public.

At this point our new ideas are just discussion drafts because we want to hear from real people at the table today and incorporate their thoughts and feedback into the final package.

So, without taking up any more time, let's hear from our Members and stakeholders. For format, I would ask our stakeholders to be aware of Members' time restrictions – Members will be coming and going based on their Committee and other commitments. We have a few members who have alerted me and my staff that they need to leave early, so they will go towards the beginning of the comment period. Everyone besides Karen Budd-Falen from DOI will have three minutes for their verbal comments so everyone can have a turn. If you have more to say than three minutes, send it our way and we will link to it on our website.