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9/24/19 Statement of Ryan Yates, Director of Congressional Relations, American Farm Bureau Federation

Good Afternoon Representative Gosar and Members of the Western Caucus.

My name is Ryan Yates, and I serve as Director of Congressional Relations at the American Farm Bureau Federation. On behalf of the nearly 6 million Farm Bureau member families across the United States, I commend you and the members of the Congressional Western Caucus for your leadership in the development of common-sense modifications to improve the Endangered Species Act (ESA). For the last 30 years, Congress has been unable or unwilling to successfully provide meaningful changes to the ESA while allowing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and activist judges free reign to fundamentally alter and strengthen the regulatory power of the ESA through rulemaking after rulemaking.

It has been thirty one years since the last significant amendment to the ESA was signed into law. Today, the ESA provides “protections” for 1,662 domestic species at a cost to the American taxpayer of roughly \$1.4 billion a year. (FY 2016). However, only 3 percent of species have been successfully recovered and removed from the list since the law was enacted 46 years ago.

ESA modernization is necessary because there are clear shortcomings associated with the upkeep and recovery rate of listed species. Congress intended for the ESA to recover species from the brink of extinction, but the law fails to accomplish this intended purpose by prioritizing species listings over actual recovery and habitat conservation. Unfortunately, the law fails to provide adequate incentives for working lands species conservation and imposes far-reaching regulatory burdens, which restrict agriculture’s ability to produce food, fuel and fiber for consumers here at home and around the world.

Unlike other industries, farm and ranch land is the principal asset used in their business. ESA restrictions are especially harsh for farmers and ranchers because the law prevents them from making productive use of their primary business asset. Unlike other industries, farmers and ranchers typically live on the land in which they work and operate with a strong focus on both economic and environmental stewardship.

Despite the fact that the ESA was enacted to promote the public good, farmers and ranchers bear the financial brunt of providing food and habitat for listed species through restrictions imposed by the ESA. Society expects that listed species be saved and their habitats protected, but this cost falls on the landowner upon whose property a species is found.

Of course, no one wants to see American wildlife disappear from our landscape, but it is time for common sense reform that brings farmers and ranchers to the table. The legislative package developed by members of the Congressional Western Caucus is a breath of fresh air to American farmers, ranchers, and landowners. By enacting these bills into law, the ESA will be modernized to provide clarity and certainty, encourage voluntary conservation, increase local government and stakeholder involvement, and chart a path for real recovery of threatened and endangered species.