

## PROTECT THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT!!!

By The Rev. Canon Martha Kirkpatrick and The Rev. Robert Hall

Delaware loves its wildlife and the great outdoors. We love to camp, hike and bird watch. We understand that nature and wildlife contribute to our state and local economies as well as to our quality of life.

According to the Outdoor Industry Association in Delaware in 2017, outdoor recreation created 29,000 jobs, \$3.1 billion in consumer spending, generated \$959 million in wages and salaries as well as \$145 million in state and local tax revenue.

We are fortunate to have only a few threatened and endangered species in our state. The northern long-eared bat, red knot, piping plover, sea turtles and bog turtle, as well as five amazing plant species. We like to think this is due to our wonderful voters and elected officials that realize how important nature and healthy ecosystems are in Delaware. We love our imperiled wildlife and look forward to celebrating its full recovery.

However, over the past few years, we have watched in dismay and heartbreak as wildlife across the country has been decimated. From polar bears in Alaska to orcas in the Pacific, from the tiny San Bernardino kangaroo rat to crucially important pollinators, wildlife throughout America is in crisis. As our wildlife suffer, so do our state-based and national economies. We are all connected and we are all dependent on each other.

So what is our government doing to help wildlife? They are destroying the Endangered Species Act. The Endangered Species Act is the world's preeminent conservation law and our nation's most effective law for protecting wildlife in danger of extinction. Since its inception, 99% of species that have received protections under the Act are still with us today. In large measure due to the Act, iconic species like the bald eagle, the American alligator, and the brown pelican have recovered and been delisted. And the Endangered Species Act is incredibly popular. Reliable polling as shown repeatedly that 90 percent of American voters support the law.

Leaders from faith communities perceive the Endangered Species Act as a modern-day "Noah's Ark," protecting animals and plants created by God and promised eternal preservation. All major world's religions regard the diversity of life on our planet as a testimony to the Creator's goodness and wisdom. This includes St. Thomas Aquinas (Christian) and Moses Maimonides (Jewish) as well as the Quran. Pope Francis, himself a highly educated scientist, has commented on our poor stewardship of the Creation, "because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right."

Yet the federal government has created new rules that will severely weaken the Act. The rules will: bias listing decisions with unreliable economic analyses; make it much more difficult to protect species impacted by climate change; make it more difficult to list a new species and easier to remove those now on the list; make it harder to designate critical habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife; reduce protections for threatened species; reduce voluntary conservation incentives; make it more difficult to protect critical habitat; and weaken the extremely important consultation process.

Plants and animals across our nation are in crisis. This is not the time to weaken protections. Our Department of Interior is charged with defending American plant and wildlife, a legacy that goes more than a hundred years back to President Theodore Roosevelt. The Department of Interior should work on behalf of the American people, who know the Act is crucial to our economy, public health and quality of life. Congress must reject these changes.

It is often argued that the preservation of species is a threat to business. Yet agribusiness and other entities in food production and distribution are sorely impacted by reckless attacks on animals and plants. The well-publicized threats to bees and other pollinators directly impact agriculture, leading to potential food shortages. We benefit from the great biodiversity in our land and the science behind the importance of preventing extinction is undeniable.

We are ordained clergypersons who have worked to mobilize our faith communities in support of health and welfare. We have come to realize that this necessarily includes protecting Delaware's natural environment. As clergy, we have worked and will continue to work to save our native plants and animals. We are calling in confidence on our outstanding Congressional delegation – Senators Carper and Coons and Representative Blunt Rochester - to take leadership in rejecting these changes and overturning these regulations.

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