

Letters to the Editor

Instead of Subsidizing Ranchers, Preserve Species

THE JOURNAL'S editorial, "Political Minefield No Safe Haven for Species," ignores the effectiveness of the current Endangered Species Act and the expert opinions of 5,738 biologists who recently signed a letter delivered to every U.S. senator.

The scientists, 132 of them from New Mexico, including me, concluded that revisions to the Endangered Species Act proposed by Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Calif., would doom species to extinction.

Proposed revisions would put scientific decisions in the hands of political appointees, weaken protection for habitats that are critical for the survival and recovery of wild animals and plants, and even allow for widespread poisoning of wildlife.

The Endangered Species Act protects animals and plants. Less than 1 percent of species listed under the act have gone extinct, while 10 percent of qualifying species waiting to be listed have suffered that fate.

Endangered species programs have not been adequately funded, especially under the current administration, resulting in creatures languishing without protection until it is much harder or too late to protect them.

Incentives can help conserve Mexican wolves and other imperiled species and their habitats, but only when coupled with requirements that actually allow wolves to survive on our public lands. Livestock losses are currently compensated and wolves that kill livestock are removed, even on public lands— a perverse incentive.

The Journal of Wildlife Management's recent peer-reviewed article, "Why Compensating Wildlife Damages May be Bad for Conservation," concludes that livestock compensation programs remove the impetus for protecting stock. The authors favor compensation schemes based on predator abundance such as currently used in Sweden rather than livestock damages.

Our public forests and wild lands produce less than 5 percent of the nation's beef but are the only places remaining where wolves and many other wild species have a chance to survive.

According to the General Accounting Office, public lands ranching operated at a net loss of \$123 million taxpayer dollars in fiscal year 2004. Rather than increasing subsidies to public lands ranchers, those tax dollars should be used to fairly compensate willing ranchers for relinquishing their public lands grazing

privileges. This innovative approach would benefit both struggling ranchers and threatened wildlife.

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