



# The Endangered Species Act: Protecting People and Wildlife from Harmful Pesticides

Several bills have been introduced that would roll back Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections from dangerous pesticides that pollute our water, kill imperiled wildlife and endanger human health.

## WHY THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT IS IMPORTANT

In the 1950s, the widespread use of environmentally pernicious pesticides such as DDT played a major role in the rapid decline of iconic species including the bald eagle, peregrine falcon and California condor. Though DDT was banned in the U.S. in 1972, other commonly used pesticides continue to do serious harm to endangered salmon, frogs, and sea turtles, and kill more than 67 million birds every year.

Under the Endangered Species Act, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must consult with federal wildlife agencies to ensure that pesticide use does not unacceptably harm threatened or endangered wildlife. These consultations result in “biological opinions” based on the best available science that help EPA reduce the impacts of pesticide use on endangered wildlife.

**EPA must continue to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service, and must be held responsible for following those recommendations. Making sure that EPA carries out its duties under the Endangered Species Act is critical to providing clean water, protecting imperiled wildlife and safeguarding human health.**

### FIFRA Isn't Enough

The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) is the primary law that regulates pesticides, but it alone does not adequately protect endangered species. EPA implements this law by balancing the profits from using a pesticide against the dollar value of harm caused by that pesticide to the environment. ***Under FIFRA, nothing prevents EPA from approving the use of pesticides that would cause the extinction of listed species.*** The Endangered Species Act, on the other hand, recognizes that no dollar amount can be placed on the extinction of our nation's treasured wildlife.



## PROTECTING SALMON IN THE NORTHWEST

**Pesticides harm salmon in many ways, including by killing them directly, affecting their food supply and habitat, impairing their ability to swim, and interfering with their ability to navigate back to their home streams to spawn. In addition to poisoning endangered fish, pesticides also pollute the water and land that humans depend on.**

Under the Endangered Species Act, EPA must consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the effects of 37 pesticides on salmon and steelhead in the Pacific Northwest. NMFS has already determined that six of these pesticides are likely to seriously harm 27 protected salmon species. This includes three organophosphate pesticides that are also linked to behavioral problems in humans. One in particular, chlorpyrifos, is associated with delayed mental development and behavioral problems in children. Yet organophosphates have been found in every water basin sampled on the West Coast. In fact, more than 90 percent of waterways affected by waste from cities or agriculture contain two or more pesticides.

**When adequately protected, healthy salmon populations and clean rivers create local jobs in fishing and ecotourism.**

# ESA: Protecting People and Wildlife from Pesticides

In 1988, before Northwest salmon populations had dropped sharply, salmon fishing provided income to more than 21,000 families and contributed more than \$1.2 billion to the entire Northwest economy (\$415 million to Washington state alone). A 2005 study also showed that restored salmon and steelhead fisheries could yield more than \$544 million a year in economic activity in Idaho, with \$196 million from direct, out-of-pocket expenses by anglers\*\*.

## Agribusiness Opposition, EPA delays

Two and a half years ago, NMFS issued the first of several biological opinions requiring EPA to implement no-spray buffer zones and other pesticide use restrictions to protect salmon streams. These biological opinions were developed in a transparent manner, incorporating hundreds of comments from concerned citizens as well as pesticide manufacturers.

However, the agribusiness and farm lobbies continue to spurn these expert opinions and oppose even modest attempts by EPA to curb the deadly effects of pesticides. ***EPA has also failed to implement any of these restrictions and is allowing toxic pesticides to continue to contaminate the waters of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and California.***

## PROTECTING BIRDS, BATS AND POLLINATORS

**Excessive pesticide use is a serious threat to birds, bats, and pollinator insects that provide a healthy and productive environment.**

Studies show that a single spraying of a highly toxic pesticide to a field can kill seven to 25 songbirds per acre, and many of these birds suffered from severely depressed neurological function after the spraying. Of the 672 million birds exposed annually to pesticides on U.S. agricultural lands, at least 67 million are killed. Because of a combination of factors, including habitat loss and chemical poisoning, over 50 pollinator species are now listed under the Endangered Species Act.

**Consultations under the Endangered Species Act are critical to ensuring that pesticide use does not unacceptably harm imperiled birds, bats, and other**

**wildlife that pollinate crops, control pests and limit the spread of disease.**

At the national level, \$14 billion worth of U.S. crops depend on pollinators, and the California almond industry relies entirely on honey bees to pollinate almond trees. Globally, some 87 out of the 115 leading global food crops depend on animal pollination including important cash crops such as cocoa and coffee.

Birds and bats provide tremendous benefits to humans by controlling insects and the diseases they carry. A single bat may consume up to 3,000 insects nightly, especially mosquitoes. In south-central Texas alone, bats were estimated to provide \$741,000 per year of pest control services for cotton producers.



Birds provide similar services, and the potential consequences of their decline include the extinctions of plants that depend on birds for pollination and seed dispersal, increases in the numbers of insect pests, increases in crop damage, and the spread of human diseases via rotting animal carcasses.

## UPHOLD ESA, ENFORCE BIOLOGICAL OPINIONS

**Congress must uphold the scientific principles of the Endangered Species Act and reject attempts by the pesticide industry to undermine protections for imperiled wildlife that also provide clean water and safeguard human health.**

Neither of these solutions requires “fixing” the Endangered Species Act, which is flexible enough to protect wildlife and human health while accommodating economic growth. By following the recommendations of expert biologists, EPA can prevent the unnecessary poisoning of endangered fish, birds, bats and insects and preserve the economic benefits that those animals provide.

\*\* Reading, D.C. (2005). “The Potential Economic Impact of Restored Salmon and Steelhead Fishing in Idaho.” Report prepared for Idaho Rivers United by Ben Johnson Associates, Inc.