Endangered Species Act and Wolf Preservation

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) was passed by the U.S. Congress to protect animal species whose population is severely declining, and the ecosystem that they are dependent on for their survival. The goal of the ESA is to recover the population of a species to a more stable and healthier rate. According to the ESA, an endangered species is one of which is close to becoming extinct due to its low population. A threatened species is one which is likely to become endangered (FWS, 2006). Any U.S. native animal and plants species can be protected by ESA. The ESA is managed by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) which is responsible for protecting land and freshwater organisms, and by the Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) which monitors marine organisms (FWS, 2006). As of May 1, 2006, 1,868 species have been listed as endangered or threatened by the FWS which includes 1,300 listed species which live in the U.S. (FWS, 2007a).

A species is eligible to be listed as endangered or threatened if one of these situations exist: its habitat must be in danger if the species must be exploited in any way such as for consumer use or for educational of scientific means, the species must be threatened by diseases or predation, must be in danger of survival or protection, whether human or natural causes (FWS, 2006). When one or more of these causes are affecting the existence and survival of the species, the FWS may list it as either endangered or threatened. The FWS makes this decision based on scientific observation and peer review (Miller, 2005).

In addition, federal government agencies are expected to use their power to protect these endangered or threatened species, and the places where they live or thrive. Such places are to be listed as critical habitats by these agencies to conserve the endangered or threatened species (FWS, 2006). Some of these critical habitats may be privately-owned lands. In fact, about two-thirds of federally listed species have a part of their critical habitat on privately-owned land (FWS, 2006). For this reason, the FWS has been searching for more ways to protect landowners' interests while trying to protect and conserve listed species. One approach is the *Habitat Conservation Plan* or HCP (FWS, 2006). According to Miller (2005), under an HCP agreement, landowners, developers, or loggers are permitted to destroy some of the critical habitat or kill listed species on privately-owned land. For example grey wolves are permitted to be killed if

they attack a landowner's livestock, a human, or property (Marco and Paquet, 2004; DOI, 2005). However, a majority of landowners in the U.S. have been strongly opposed to the ESA because they find it invasive and overall ineffective (Miller, 2005). For example, some private landowners living in the western U.S. believe that their private property rights are being violated, and that the ESA operates on the belief that protecting listed species is more important than their rights as landowners.

There are also wildlife scientists and conservationists who believe that the ESA must be improved, but they seek more funding for implementing the law, ways to make recovery plans happen more quickly, and also seek to protect a listed species' critical habitat for about 25-50 years as an emergency plan (Miller, 2005). According to Miller (2005), this plan would affect species that have better chances of recovering than others. Disagreements have arisen about the idea of an emergency plan for some species which would receive more protection than others because some believe that all species should have the chance to recover. Due to the fact that funding for the ESA is limited, this proposes a better way to handle the problem with several listed species (Miller, 2005).

The grey wolf was previously listed under the ESA and it serves as an example of a success story for this species protection law. According to Mech and Boitani (2004), the grey wolf once had a large habitat throughout the Northern hemisphere. However, its range has been decreased to about one-third due to protection of landowner's livestock, agriculture, commercial use, and growth of human population in rural areas (Mech and Boitani, 2004). For example, according to Musiani and Paquet (2004), wolves are killed for sport and commercial uses in Alaska and in parts of Canada. Grey wolves have also been killed to protect their livestock and poisoned by landowners to protect their property with the authority of the FWS (Musiani and Paquet, 2004). However, the grey wolf has been killed illegally out of fear, for sport, and has been viewed negatively by people (Musiani and Paquet, 2004). Nonetheless some of these negative views have changed over time, and there have been more efforts by people to recover its population in Canada and in the U.S (Musiani and Paquet, 2004).

For example, the population of the grey wolf has been recovered in the Western Great Lakes region of the U.S which includes, the states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, and parts of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio (FWS, 2007b). According to the Fish and Wildlife Services, the population of grey wolves was in the lower hundreds in

Minnesota when they where endangered in the seventies. Today, the population has risen to 4000 and it is present in vast parts of Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. However, they still face threats such as loss of habitat, commercial exploitations, disease, predation, violation of protection laws, and other natural or human threats (FWS, 2007b). Their improving recovery is dependent on the management of states and Native American tribes. For example, Native American tribal members have the same authority on their reservation lands under an individual state's wildlife authority (DOI, 2005). The Native American tribes have allowed grey wolves within their reservations, and can lead a wolf management plan within their reservations equal in power to the State in parts of the Great Lakes Distinct Population segment (DOI, 2005). Also the Fish and Wildlife Service is watching the wolf populations in this region for five years to ensure it will not go back to its threatened or endangered status (FWS, 2007b).

I find that the ESA has had a positive effect on the recovery of the grey wolves and some bird species such as whooping cranes, Kirtland warblers, and American Bald eagles. For example, according to Beane (2005), the Kirtland warbler was estimated to have a population of 167 male birds a few months after the ESA was issued. With the passing of the ESA and its enforcement the Kirtland warbler recovered its population of singing males to 1,341 (Beane, 2005). Like the grey wolf, conservation plans have been needed to protect the Kirtland warbler's population from declining (Beane, 2005). According to Bean (2005), efforts to conserve these species would not have begun without the passing of the ESA because their population rates were increasingly low beforehand. This situation is similar to the grey wolf's past situation in the 1970s, in which it was being killed off without any kind of protection from wildlife conservation groups (Musiani, and Paquet, 2004). Government intervention and wildlife services such as the Fish and Wildlife Service provide a need for animals that are in danger of becoming extinct. However, according to Bean (2005), U.S. Congress finds the ESA to be a failure because only 12 of 1300 listed species have been recovered. In addition this had led to conflict with state and federal agencies to fully support the Act and provide more funding for it (Bean 2005). I disagree with the idea that the ESA has been a failure. I think that it is important to have an act that protects endangered species, and aids them with recovering their population. According to Miller (2005), protecting wildlife species is important for the planet because they are useful to all living species through their actions such as food production and medicine. I also support the ESA for this fact. I think that does who oppose the ESA need to educate themselves more on the issues

that surround our biodiversity so that they stop finding the act ineffective and useless but that also the ESA would find more ways to manage critical habitat plans with landowners, loggers, and land developers. It is of great use that we have an act that protects species and is doing what it can to give funding, and support measures to protect and recover endangered and threatened species. It is clear that based on the recovery with the Kirtland warbler, the Whooping crane, the Bald Eagle, and the Grey Wolf that strong efforts have been made to recover their population among other species. However, I also think that species should not be listed when their population rate is close to reaching extinction. I think that more research of species that may be threatened could help provide support from letting them enter a worse population rate decline. I also think that if people would raise more awareness about the importance and benefits of preserving wildlife, it may lead U.S. citizens to vote in favor of providing more economic support for protecting and recovering listed species.

Citations

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