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Posted: 05/18/2007

Endangered Species Act Has Harmed Endangered Species

Fearful Landowners Forced to Take Pre-emptive Action, says NCPA Scholar

DALLAS (May 18, 2007) - Today is the second annual "Endangered Species Day," as declared by the U.S. Senate in honor of the Endangered Species Act. Yet rather than a cause for celebration, animal lovers and private property owners should view this day with sadness, according to an expert with the National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA).

"The law of unintended consequences has wreaked havoc on wildlife and landowners due to the Endangered Species Act," said NCPA Adjunct Scholar Brian Seasholes. "The ESA punishes landowners for harboring endangered species, and the tragic result has been a scorched earth policy towards the very species the Act is supposed to protect."

Seasholes notes that there is growing evidence that many landowners are actively managing their land so as to avoid potential endangered species problems. For example:

- The ESA's protections for the red-cockaded woodpecker, which locked-up more than \$1.4 million worth of timber for a single landowner, inspired widespread "panic cutting" across North Carolina. Researchers from Montana State University and Towson State University found landowners preemptively cut 15,144 acres of trees, which could have supported 76 colonies of woodpeckers.
- Concern over protections for the spotted owl has led to "panic cutting" across the Pacific Northwest. For instance, a Washington state property owner clear-cut his 24-acres of land out of fear of owls being spotted taking residence in his trees.
- Researchers at the University of Michigan surveyed Colorado landowners whose property was located in the habitat for the jumping mouse. They found 26 percent of them managed their land so as to make it inhospitable to the mouse, and most would not let their land be surveyed for the mouse due to fear of ESA related land-use restrictions.

"If one had deliberately written legislation to harm endangered species, it would be almost impossible to top the ESA," said Seasholes. "The only way to reverse this is to remove the penalties. Unfortunately, most in Congress are more interested in gimmicks and so-called incentives, which will do little for America's wildlife and landowners."

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