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Delaware needs a strong Endangered Species Act



Your Turn

The Rev. Canon Martha Kirkpatrick and The Rev. Robert Hall
 Guest columnists

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, 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 in Delaware in 2017.

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 who 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 suffers, so do our state-based and national economies.

We are all connected and we are all dependent on each other.

So what is the Trump administration doing to help wildlife? It is 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 de-listed.

And the Endangered Species Act is incredibly popular. Reliable polling as shown repeatedly that 90% of American voters support the law.

Yet the Trump Administration 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; re-



An adult piping plover. KEVIN BRONSON/DNREC

duce 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.

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.

The Rev. Canon Martha Kirkpatrick is Canon to the Ordinary for the Episcopal Diocese of Delaware. Before entering the ministry, she was Commissioner of the Maine Department of Natural Resources.

The Rev. Robert Hall is Ecumenical Officer for the Peninsula-Delaware Conference of The United Methodist Church and Pastor of Salem United Methodist Church. He is active in Creation Justice Ministries and the Endangered Species Coalition.