

Slide 4: Finding, Purposes, and Policy Section 2

Slide 5: Findings

Section 2 explains why the Endangered Species Act was passed.

Congress wrote, “Various species of fish, wildlife, and plants in the United States have been rendered extinct as a consequence of economic growth and development untempered by adequate concern and conservation.”

By the middle of the 20th century, some species had already gone extinct from human activities. The last known passenger pigeon, seen in flocks of millions in the 1850s, died in captivity in 1914. This species’ decline was due to the clearing of forests used by the passenger pigeons for roosting and feeding, and hunting pigeons for food and reduction of crop damage.

And the outlook was the same for great whales, peregrine falcons, American alligators, bald eagles, and whooping cranes.

Congress acknowledged that fact and the potential future fate of others. It wrote, “Other species of fish, wildlife, and plants have been so depleted in numbers that they are in danger of or threatened with extinction ...” With the ESA, Congress made endangered species protection and conservation a matter of national policy.

Slide 6: Findings

When explaining why species should be saved from extinction, Congress stated, “These species ... are of esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people ...” Species, Congress told America, have a purpose in nature and both direct and indirect value to people.

Interestingly, there was no reference in the 1973 law to genetic variation and evolutionary function. This was not an intentional omission, but more of a reflection of an era, when there was less attention to these larger concerns, and to the conservation of ecosystems and their values to people. The use of the term “ecological” implies genetics and evolution, but it’s taken decades for these broader values to emerge.

Slide 7: Purpose

In Section 2, Congress identified three purposes of the Act:

- the means to conserve ecosystems on which species depend,
- a program for conservation of listed species, and
- steps to achieve the purposes of conservation treaties and international conventions.

Notice what’s right up front – “conservation of ecosystems upon which endangered and threatened species depend.” It is not sufficient to save species in zoos; they are to be conserved as living, functioning components of ecosystems in the wild.

Slide 8: Policy

Section 2 sets as policy that all Federal departments and agencies conserve listed species and use their authorities to further the purposes of the Act. Congress declared that *all* Federal agencies must help conserve listed species. That's an expectation you'll learn more about in Section 7, covered later in this course.

Finally, Section 2 directs the Federal Government to resolve water issues with states and local agencies in ways that conserve listed species. In fact, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service work cooperatively with states, local agencies, and private landowners to resolve most issues. They don't have to be water-related.