

September 25, 2018

Dear Members of Congress:

As denominations representing a broad spectrum of religious traditions and more than 10 million congregants, we write to you today unified in our support for the protection of God's precious and good creation and in particular the Endangered Species Act. This bedrock piece of conservation law has been extremely effective in preventing species from becoming extinct and we urge Congress to uphold this critical piece of legislation. Dismantling it or entangling it in unnecessary and damaging modifications or loopholes will only serve to diminish its effectiveness.

Our Scriptures are filled with messages about taking care of Creation. In those passages, we are reminded that the world belongs to God and we are instructed to be stewards of God's earth. The story of Noah's ark sets forth an example for us to follow as we care for creatures great and small. God's instructions were clear to Noah: protect each and every one, two by two. We note that in the story, following the flood, God's covenant with Noah and his descendants as well as with the entirety of Creation makes it clear that God views Creation, both human and non-human, as valuable and as being in relationship with one another.

It is with this perspective that we view the Endangered Species Act, a modern day Noah's Ark that can preserve the creation that God has bestowed in our care. Any action, legislative or otherwise, that weakens the Endangered Species Act or puts economics or individual interests before our duty as stewards runs contrary to our moral charge.

Because of our strong conviction that God entrusted the care of Creation to us, including the most vulnerable species, religious denominations over the years have released policy statements urging that we, as a nation, uphold our duty to steward God's creatures. In 1993, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ passed a resolution entitled "Respect for Animals," that reminds church members that God has given humanity responsibility for the care and protection of all living creatures.

Following that resolution, a 2001 statement passed by the 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church that called for government "face the severity of thus (mass extinction) threat, and to take the steps in practice, polity and systemic change that will prevent mass extinction and preserve the biodiversity essential to the flourishing of life." The United Methodist Church, one of the largest religious denominations in the country, also issued a policy statement on the "Preservation of the Diversity of Life," which stated "that the wondrous diversity of nature is a key part of God's plan for creation. Therefore, we oppose measures which would eliminate diversity in plant and animal varieties, eliminate species, or destroy habitats critical to the survival of endangered species." Inspired by the commandment of Bal Taschit, do not destroy, the

Union for Reform Judaism passed a resolution in 1991 calling on the government to “protect our current wilderness areas, create new ones, and work to protect ecologically sensitive and endangered bioregions of the world” and “ensure the continuation of animal and plant species.”

The set of nine bills introduced this summer run counter to our stewardship mandate for species protection. Taken collectively, these nine bills would work to undermine the current Endangered Species Act, which has been one of our most successful tools for preventing extinction. This package of bills creates loopholes, allows for state veto rights, limits legal recourse, and resurrects barriers to listing species. These bills are not science-based and will undercut the ability of current and future endangered and threatened species to survive.

We urge the House Natural Resources Committee to reject this package of nine bills that would be detrimental to the Endangered Species Act and thus to God’s creation.

Sincerely,

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