

## Tips for Talking about the Wildlife Crisis

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**LEAD WITH WILDLIFE** – When choosing a wildlife species to discuss, look for a species that is...

- listed in your state's wildlife action plan
- “cute”, charismatic, or well-liked and known
- in decline or facing some type of real peril--does not have to be officially endangered
- has concrete actions to be taken to help it recover
- (NICE-TO-HAVE) a keystone species, like gopher tortoise or prairie dogs
- (NICE-TO-HAVE) reliant on habitats like clean water or healthy forests that people also need or enjoy
- (NICE-TO-HAVE) economically important in some way (e.g. pollinator, water filtration, game species)
- See [this species list](#) for good examples

### AT RISK and ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT MESSAGING

- The bill (or whatever you are working on) will help prevent wildlife from declining and becoming endangered, by funding proactive conservation actions. It also will also help recover species that are already endangered.
- Keep messaging about the Endangered Species Act positive. “No need to wait.” “Early action is better for wildlife and saves money in the long run.”
- When speaking to the media or the public, avoid bringing up the ESA's “regulatory burden” or the “burden on businesses.” If you want to address this, just say generally that it is “better for business.” (Most people simply aren't aware that ESA listings come with restrictions and often trigger lawsuits.)
- Talk about success stories, there is hope for recovery--examples: bald eagle, Kirtland's warbler, peregrine falcon, pronghorn, striped bass, wild turkey, etc.
- NOTE: Most people have no idea what the difference is between a species being “vulnerable,” “at-risk,” “threatened,” or “endangered.” As wildlife professionals, we understand these distinctions, but even many highly educated people do not understand the fine distinctions here.
- When speaking generally about wildlife that would be helped by this bill, you can use vulnerable, at risk, or declining. Use “threatened” or “endangered” only when it is a species legally listed as such under federal or state endangered species legislation.

### AMERICA'S WILDLIFE CRISIS: BY THE NUMBERS

Here is a brief summary of some of the key statistics we often use. These are all different sources of information--they are apples to oranges--and it is important not to conflate them. [Click here for a longer discussion about accuracy in wildlife crisis messaging.](#)

#### **1/3 of Species at Increased Risk of Extinction:**

- This is an estimate of extinction risk. It refers to species with global conservation status rank of G3 (vulnerable) through G1 (critically imperiled).
- Rankings by NatureServe and state natural heritage programs based on verified occurrences and population trends. Looks at the best-known species of plants and animals.
- 150 U.S. species already have gone extinct (GX or presumed extinct) and another 500 or so have not been seen recently and may be extinct (ranked as GH, or possibly extinct).
- The National Wildlife Federation, The Wildlife Society and the American Fisheries Society released a report, [Reversing the Wildlife Crisis](#), that analyzed and publicized this information.
- Learn more: <http://explorer.natureserve.org/>

#### **12,000+ Species of Greatest Conservation Need:**

- Number of species the states and territories have identified as in need of conservation attention and action in the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plans.
- Not an estimate of extinction risk. Some of these species are fairly common but may need assistance in a particular location, for example.
- Some of these 12,000+ species are plants. Therefore always use the word “species” with this number, never “wildlife.” Not all states included plants in their Action Plans so this is not a reflection of all species but an indicator of how many are needing conservation attention.
- Species of Greatest Conservation Need lists are developed by each state/territorial wildlife agency with participation from partners and the public
- Primary target of funding from the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act.
- Please refrain from using the acronym SGCN.
- Learn more: <https://www1.usgs.gov/csas/swap/>

#### **1600+ Species Listed Under the Endangered Species Act**

- Number of federally listed threatened and endangered species in the United States.
- This includes plants, so say “species” not wildlife.
- Learn more: <https://www.fws.gov/endangered/>

#### **3 Billion Birds - Study**

- Major new study in the journal Science, released 9/19/2019.
- There are 2.9 billion fewer breeding birds in North America than there were in 1970, a population decline of approximately 29%.
- This study looks at the numbers of individual birds in the United States (minus Hawaii) and Canada. It does not measure extinction risk.
- Even common species have undergone staggering losses in numbers (e.g. meadowlark).
- Over this same period, landmark conservation efforts substantially helped **increase** waterfowl like ducks, geese (56% increase), eagles, hawks, and other raptors.
- The investment in and recovery of waterfowl points the way how we can recover other wildlife species should funding become available through the Recovering Wildlife Act.
- Learn more: <https://www.3billionbirds.org/findings>

#### **EXAMPLE MESSAGING:**

More than one-third of America’s fish and wildlife species are now at risk of extinction. In the United States alone, more than 1,600 species are already listed under the Endangered Species

Act, another 150 are presumed extinct, and state wildlife agencies have identified more than 12,000 Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

This is part of Earth's unfolding sixth mass extinction, in which, according to a recent United Nations assessment, more than 1 million animal and plant species could vanish in the coming decades. The causes of this crisis vary in different parts of the world, but in the United States, the key drivers of species declines are habitat loss, invasive species, disease, and the impacts of a shifting climate.

**MESSAGING TIPS** — *For public facing audiences, it is best to explain our technical terms of art rather than to just stay them.*

- Instead of “State Wildlife Action Plans” try explaining what it is: “Every ten years, experts with the state wildlife agencies look at how wildlife in each state are doing and make a list of the species that are not doing well or that they are concerned need proactive conservation attention.”
- Instead of “Species of Greatest Conservation Need,” try -- “there are XXX species in our state that are in need (shorter) or that need proactive conservation attention now (longer), before things get worse”

**SIMPLE PHRASES TO USE:** *Have these on hand when talking to the media, Hill and many coalition partners.*

- The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (or whatever you are working on) will be the most significant investment in wildlife conservation in many decades (since the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 (or add state based legislation).
- The bill (customize) will fund state-led efforts to help wildlife at risk and to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered and recover those already endangered.
- Customize: We are grateful to the diverse group of bipartisan Members of Congress for supporting the bill (Add your state names). This bill is a reminder that when we work together we still can accomplish great things, despite the gridlock. We already have 165+ cosponsors -- with both parties strongly represented.
- You may have seen the headlines that globally as many as one million species could be headed for extinction in the coming decades.
- Right now, we're in a race against time to avert a looming wildlife extinction crisis.
- Unfortunately, this crisis isn't just happening across the ocean, wildlife are in trouble right here at home. America's wildlife are in crisis — and inaction is the ally of extinction.
- It is not too late. There is a lot we can do for these species, but finding the money is a challenge. Right now the federal funding (CUSTOMIZE) available is about five percent of what we'd need to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered in every state.

- An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. That’s the principle behind this bill.
- Generally, it is cheaper and more effective to step in as a wildlife species is starting to decline rather than waiting until it is threatened with imminent extinction. If a species is in such bad shape that it qualifies for the “emergency room” measures of the Endangered Species Act, it is much more difficult – and more expensive – to recover the species.
- Preventing wildlife from becoming endangered is: GOOD FOR WILDLIFE, GOOD FOR TAXPAYERS, and GOOD FOR BUSINESS.
- Some of the things we will do to help wildlife will also help people. EXAMPLES FROM YOUR STATE’S WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN IF YOU HAVE THEM – GENERAL SUGGESTIONS BELOW.
  - Taking actions that help trout or mussels will result in better water quality in our rivers and streams.
  - Protecting the wetlands used by frogs, turtles and salamanders can help protect communities from flooding.
  - Boosting butterfly and bee populations can help provide pollination needed by local farmers and our food supply
  - By helping vulnerable grassland birds and Monarch Butterflies, other wildlife species will be helped by these habitat conservation efforts.