



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**

ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

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Ag Commissioner Gipson Applauds Efforts in Development of Endangered Species Act Amendments

JACKSON, Miss. – Agriculture and Commerce Commissioner Andy Gipson applauds U.S. Senator Roger Wicker and U.S. Senator John Barrasso, Chairman of the Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee, for their leadership in the development of the Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018.

The United States Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee convened today to hear testimony on the topic of successful state conservation and management of wildlife and their habitat. The hearing provided examples of how state agencies with collaboration from private industry and academia have been successful in conservation efforts. “The record from today’s proceeding supports proposed amendments to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 that are before the Committee,” said Commissioner Gipson.

The proposed amendments to the ESA will elevate the role of states in endangered species management and provide regulatory certainty for landowners and other stakeholders to facilitate participation in conservation and recovery activities, among other things. “Our state agencies and our farmers and ranchers have the common goal of conserving our land in Mississippi. Farms and ranches occupy much of the privately owned lands in Mississippi. These lands provide habitat for endangered and threatened species. Additionally, state agencies generally have better localized data. Decision-making under the ESA should incorporate this data and input from state agencies and land grant universities, local governments, and private parties. The proposed amendments provide more local input and transparency in species listing decisions made under the ESA,” said Commissioner Gipson.

Today, Mississippi Farm Bureau and staff from the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce attended the hearing together. Mississippi Farm Bureau President Mike McCormick testified before the Committee sharing the success of the Mississippi Bee Stewardship Program, a collaborative effort between beekeepers, private landowners and the Department to protect pollinators through voluntary efforts. On behalf of Mississippi’s agricultural landowners, Commissioner Gipson also submitted a letter to the Committee sharing the state’s successes in this area and supporting these amendments. “Thank you to Senator Roger Wicker and the Committee for making this letter a part of the record and for consideration of the states’ role in this issue,” added Commissioner Gipson.

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Attached:

Letter of support from the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce submitted to the U.S. Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee.



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COMMISSIONER

October 10, 2018

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman, Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce thanks you for your leadership in the development of the Endangered Species Act Amendments of 2018. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 is outdated and should be modernized. Emphasis on elevating states' role and increasing transparency in the implementation of the ESA is a welcomed and needed change. Agriculture is Mississippi's number one industry, and farmers and producers are critical to the protection of endangered and threatened species.

Mississippi has a robust history with regards to conservation and management of natural resources. Our state is predominantly rural and privately owned, with 36,200 farms, 10.7 million acres of farmed land, and 19.7 million acres of forestland. Farmers and landowners across the state work annually with state and federal agencies on important conservation issues and have had great success. From creating extensive critical habitat for black bears to bringing back the American alligator from near extinction, Mississippi is a leader in conservation. Our conservation success is a result of a great partnership among landowners, farmers, state and federal agencies, agricultural associations, and conservation associations. However, improvements to the ESA could be made that would better facilitate federal coordination with the states and their stakeholders.

Under the current ESA, listing decisions are often made without current, accurate, local data. Better decisions can be made with more input from local experts and stakeholders. Mississippi is fortunate to have access to applied conservation research and reliable scientific data. This access is through partnerships among various state agencies, universities, and private entities. Many of our university scientists are considered experts in their fields and are recognized nationally and internationally. State-led and university-conducted research has been instrumental in making conservation decisions for our state. Amendments to the ESA that elevate the role of states in listing decisions would provide opportunities to gain current localized data on species that are in need of protection.

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In closing, thank you once again for your consideration to expand the role of states and to increase transparency in implementation of the ESA. Mississippi agencies and stakeholders welcome the opportunity to improve conservation efforts in our state. We look forward to seeing improvements made to the ESA and the resulting benefits to the species that it is intended to protect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andy Gipson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andy Gipson
Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce