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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:** [Neal A. Patel](mailto:neal_patel@heller.senate.gov)/[Michawn Rich](mailto:michawn_rich@heller.senate.gov) | | May 7, 2015 | 202-224-6244 |   **Heller Testifies at EPW Hearing**  *Supports Efforts to Modernize the Endangered Species Act*  **(Washington, DC)** – Recently, U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) testified at the Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works hearing titled, “Fish and Wildlife Service: The President’s FY2016 Budget Request for the Fish and Wildlife Service and Legislative Hearing on Endangered Species Bill.” The hearing addressed Heller’s legislation, S. 112, the [Common Sense in Species Protection Act of 2015](http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=5defddae-f318-408f-9fb4-309222fedd25). During Heller’s testimony, he emphasized that the Endangered Species Act is out of date and ineffective and discussed a legislative effort ([S. 1036](http://lis.gov/cgi-lis/query/z?c114:S.1036:)) to improve sage-grouse conservation. Heller’s legislation balances the need to protect wildlife and the environment, while allowing for reasonable economic development. Click [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kV6hPCavaUs) or on the video below to watch Senator Heller’s testimony.   |  | | --- | |  | |  |   REMARKS AS PREPARED:  Thank you for holding today’s hearing on my legislation, the Common Sense in Species Protection Act, and the many other important Endangered Species Act-related bills on today’s agenda. I am supportive of many of these proposals; they are common-sense reforms that will help modernize the Endangered Species Act and ensure environmental laws serve both wildlife and our local communities.  Growing up in Nevada, I know being good stewards of the natural treasures our nation has been blessed with is an important part of our way of life.   Hunting, camping, and horseback riding were big parts of my upbringing and still are activities my family and I have enjoyed doing together.  It is important to me that we have effective environmental laws that balance the need to protect wildlife and the environment while allowing for reasonable economic development. I want my grandkids, their kids, and their grandkids to be able to enjoy the beauties of rural Nevada just like I have.  Unfortunately, the Endangered Species Act is a prime example of a law that has proven to be out of date and ineffective. Since the last time it was reformed over thirty years ago, it has had less than a two percent recovery rate. I know these days you get medals for just participating, but when I was in school, two percent was definitely not a passing grade. It is clear the law is not serving wildlife or our western way of life well.  While not a cure all, my bill is a simple reform aimed at modernizing the ESA and making the listing process more transparent.  When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service makes a listing decision, it not only aims to protect the species, it also affords some protection to the ecosystems that those species rely upon. They frequently make what is called “critical habitat” designations, which are lands that are essential for the conservation of a species.  Activities on these lands are heavily restricted. In states like Nevada, where mining, ranching, energy production and outdoor recreation all serve as a central component of our local economy, these restrictions can be devastating.  My bill does not take away the Interior’s authority to limit these types of activities. It simply requires the Department of Interior to report the full economic impact of any proposed critical habitat designation to the public before it can make a decision. Specifically, rather than the very limited economic analysis they currently conduct, the Service must determine the effect a designation would have on property use and values, employment, and revenues for state and local governments.  Additionally, it requires the Service to exclude areas from critical habitat designations if the benefit of keeping it in multiple-use far exceeds the benefits a restriction would have for wildlife.  Access to all lands, particularly public lands, is vital to Nevada’s character and economy. Restricting the multiple-use of those lands in a nontransparent and irrational fashion is not an option for Nevadans who rely heavily on them for their livelihood. Whether it is the greater-sage grouse, the long-eared bat, the lesser prairie chicken, or any other species the agency is making a decision on, it is critical that at a minimum we add this simple, commonsense step to the process.  Before I conclude, I’d like to briefly touch on Senator Cory Gardner’s Sage-Grouse Protection and Conservation Act.  I will let him discuss the details of his bill, but as an original cosponsor, I want to underscore the importance of this measure to the State of Nevada.  The Fish & Wildlife is expected to make a decision on whether to protect the Greater Sage-Grouse under the Endangered Species Act this fall.  Should it get listed, our rural way of life and our local economies would be devastated.  All grazing, hunting, recreation, mining, and energy production on over 19 million acres of public lands in Nevada will come to a screeching halt.  Given the threat of a listing, the eleven western states home to sage-grouse have been working diligently on state specific conservation plans.  These plans specifically aim to address each state’s unique threats to sage-grouse while protecting their local economies. It is an important tool available to states, and Interior has said they play a major factor in their listing determination.  The Sage-Grouse Protection and Conservation Act is important to those efforts because it helps states implement their plans and gives them time to show results.  In Nevada, the plan implements a conservation credit system, an innovative solution that will fund important conservation projects that benefit that sage-hen and create regulatory certainty regarding conservation of the species, which is important for our economy.  In short, users of the land, for example the mining industry, pay into the system when they affect areas that could be habitat, and the state can utilize those dollars to implement habitat restoration like cheat grass removal, pinyon juniper thinning, and riparian area rehabilitation.  In Nevada, over 80 percent of habitat is on public lands. The sage-grouse does not care if a private land owner, the state, or the federal government owns the land it inhabits.  It is extremely important Nevada is able to use the dollars generated by this system wherever it’s needed most, regardless of political boundaries.  This bill gives us that flexibility.  Two weeks ago, Secretary Jewell announced that the Service was going to reverse course on a proposed threatened listing of the Bi-State Sage Grouse, located on the California/Nevada border. This decision was the result of years of collaborative work between the states, federal agencies, ranchers, and other local stakeholders on the conservation of key habitat and reductions of threats to the bird.  It truly shows when everyone works together we can take steps to sustain wildlife without devastating our local economies with burdensome restrictions. With a chance to prove success, I think the eleven western states can do the same with the greater sage-grouse.  Thank you again Senator Inhofe for the opportunity to testify before the committee, and for the opportunity to shine a greater light on these common sense pieces of legislation.  ###  [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_fb.png](http://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Senator-Dean-Heller/325751330177) [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_tw.png](http://twitter.com/SenDeanHeller) [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_yt.png](http://www.youtube.com/user/SenDeanHeller) |
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