

# New research shows effectiveness of laws for protecting imperiled species, remaining gaps

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New research from the Center for Conservation Innovation (CCI) at Defenders of Wildlife, published in the journal *Nature Communications*, shows for the first time the importance of expert agencies to protecting

imperiled species. This paper, "Data Indicate the Importance of Expert Agencies in Conservation Policy," empirically supports the need for strong oversight of federal activities. It also suggests data-driven ways to improve efficiency without sacrificing protections. This is critical at a time when conservation laws and policies are under attack: understanding what works in conservation is essential in combatting the global biodiversity crisis.

The data analyzed by Defenders of Wildlife included every Endangered Species Act section 7 [consultation](#) between [federal agencies](#) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) from 2000 through 2017. The analysis showed that agencies and NMFS agreed on how proposed federal projects would affect listed species most of the time, and that the consultation process rarely stops projects. Importantly, however, federal agencies underestimated the effects of their actions on listed species in 15% of consultations, relative to what species experts at NMFS concluded. This included 22 extreme cases where NMFS concluded the action would jeopardize the very existence of 14 species after the agency had determined its action would do no harm. In 6% of cases, agencies overestimated the effects of their actions, which meant additional resources may have been unnecessarily spent in analyses.

"This study emphasizes the critical role that the [expert](#) biologists at the Services play in assessing the impacts of proposed federal actions on threatened and endangered species," said Michael Evans, CCI Senior Conservation Data Scientist and lead author on the study. "Our findings show that limiting or removing the Services from the consultation process could have disastrous consequences for imperiled species. And at the same time, we were able to identify areas where the consultation process could be made more efficient, without sacrificing protections to listed species."

"Recent proposals to 'streamline' consultations by removing the species

experts in the National Marine Fisheries Service from the process could be devastating to the species who need protection the most," said Jacob Malcom, Director of the Center for Conservation Innovation at Defenders of Wildlife and an author on the study. "Rather than try to cut protections, Congress should be strengthening and fully funding the expert agencies—National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—who ensure the protections for threatened and endangered [species](#)."

**More information:** Michael J. Evans et al, Novel data show expert wildlife agencies are important to endangered species protection, *Nature Communications* (2019). [DOI: 10.1038/s41467-019-11462-9](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-019-11462-9)

The data and analyses can be explored using an interactive web app hosted on the CCI webpage: [defenders-cci.org/shiny/open/NMFS\\_s7/](https://defenders-cci.org/shiny/open/NMFS_s7/)

Provided by Center for Conservation Innovation

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