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Opinion-Editorial

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**Seven of 1,300 Species Recovered, Good Enough For Government Work**  
**Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave (CO-04)**

“Shoot, shovel, and shut up” -- a phrase known by farmers and ranchers that encounter endangered species, because it may be better to hide the evidence than to endure the enormous burden the federal government imposes in protecting such species. It doesn't have to be this way, and, in fact, Colorado is building a record of success that exceeds the federal government's in protecting threatened species.

Earlier this month, I held an official hearing, in Colorado, of the House Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research that investigated the costs and impacts of the Endangered Species Act on farmers and ranchers, as well as the successes of local conservation programs using sound science, peer-reviewed data, and common-sense.

Reform is needed within this federal program, as clearly specified during this congressional hearing.

Thirty years ago, when Richard Nixon was president, this Act passed Congress and was signed into law. Since, nearly 1,300 species have been listed as 'endangered,' yet, less than 30 have been removed.

Among those that have been de-listed, only seven are because of successful recovery. Another seven were taken off the list due to extinction and eleven because they should have “never been listed in the first place,” according to the National Endangered Species Act Reform Coalition.

The witnesses who testified at this congressional hearing were a group actively involved in species preservation and Colorado's agriculture industry. Dr. Alan Foutz, of Colorado Farm Bureau, underscored a message from the hearing, stating, “We believe that, given the opportunity and proper support from the government, farmers and ranchers can do a better job of enhancing listed species than the government. As experienced, practical land managers who may have observed the species for a number of years, we bring a working knowledge that government scientists do not have.”

In addition to their abysmal record of recovery, the federal government's bureaucracy imposes very costly regulations on Colorado's agriculture producers.

One witness detailed the extraordinary efforts she and her husband took at their cattle ranch in northwest Colorado. Because of the unique demands and costs associated with the presence of sage grouse, the black footed ferret, leopard frogs, endangered fish, white tailed prairie dogs and wolves, the family was eventually forced to dig deeper into their

pockets and hire extra help. This was the costly reality of trying to run a family business while protecting the wildlife.

Throughout Colorado, community organizations and local governments are working to improve scientific research of endangered species in order to provide better insight into their lives and environment. Moreover, this research generates greater insight on effective, less costly, management for those earning a livelihood from the land. Interestingly, these local contributions often far exceed federal efforts.

The successful prevention of listing the Mountain Plover is one such example in Colorado. A public/private alliance joined together to create a voluntary conservation program containing incentives for farmers and ranchers that worked to protect this bird. It was based on a combination of accurate science, educational resources, and assistance, not government imposed mandates. The level of cooperation between researchers and land managers, as well as innovative outreach policies would not have been accomplished had the Mountain Plover been listed as 'endangered' by federal officials.

The Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse is another example. Though this animal is currently listed as endangered, data collected from local sources, not by federal authorities, has brought it much closer to being de-listed. Upwards of \$8 million of local funds have been invested through the process, simply because insufficient data collected, from only three samples of mice, resulted in the species original listing.

The original research that caused the mouse to be listed is now being called into question, even by the original researcher.

If the federal government is to accomplish the goal set out 30 years ago in the Endangered Species Act, it must institute reforms. Local conservation groups and governments have implemented successful programs and have shown they can protect threatened species with common sense, using peer review data, and incentives to increase voluntary participation.

As the only Republican from Colorado currently serving on the House Committee on Agriculture, I am pleased to have had the opportunity to hold this recent hearing and provide Coloradans a voice in the struggle to preserve endangered species.

I will keep working to ensure our state's voice is clearly represented in the nation's capitol. I will keep working for effective reforms in the Endangered Species Act. Additionally, I am planning to introduce legislation in Congress based on reforms suggested during this hearing.

*Marilyn Musgrave was elected to the United States House of Representatives in January 2003, and she represents Colorado's Fourth Congressional District. Musgrave is a member of the House Committees on Agriculture, Education and the Workforce, and Small Business. To learn more about Rep. Musgrave please visit her official website at <http://www.house.gov/musgrave>.*

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