

Endangered Species

Recognizing that numerous species of fish, wildlife, and plants in the United States have gone extinct and that others are in danger of extinction, Congress declared that certain species are of aesthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value and must be protected. The U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 protects species that are listed by the Secretary of the Interior as either endangered or threatened. **Endangered** refers to any species that is in danger of extinction, and **threatened** refers to any species that is likely to become endangered. The purposes of the act are to provide a means of conserving the ecosystems upon which endangered and threatened species depend, provide a program for conserving those species, and take steps necessary to achieve the purposes of the international treaties and conventions.¹ (U.S. Code Title 16, Chapter 35, Sec. 1531)

The act contains several provisions for protecting endangered or threatened species, including the following:

▶ The *listing* process—

The Secretary of the Interior is responsible for listing species as endangered or threatened because of any number of factors including habitat destruction, overutilization, disease or predation, inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms, or other natural or man-made factors. (U.S. Code Title 16, Chapter 35, Sec.1533)

▶ The development of a *recovery* plan—

The Secretary of the Interior is responsible for developing and implementing recovery plans for endangered and threatened species. (U.S. Code Title 16, Chapter 35, Sec. 1533)

▶ The designation of *critical habitat*—

... (i) the specific areas within the geographical area occupied by the species, at the time it is listed as threatened or endangered, on which are found physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the species, and which may require special management considerations or protection; and (ii) specific areas outside the geographical areas occupied by the species at the time it is listed, upon a determination by the Secretary that such areas are essential for the conservation of the species. (U.S. Code Title 16, Chapter 35, Sec. 1533)

Debate Questions

Question a: Should cost be considered when listing a species as endangered or threatened?

Question b: Should cost be considered when determining the critical habitat of the species?

Use the information in the Endangered Species Act as well as in the reading, "Cost/Benefit Analysis and Ethical Considerations," to help you prepare your debate position. The text of the U.S. Code may be accessed on-line at: www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/16/1531.shtml.

¹These treaties and conventions include migratory bird treaties with Canada and Mexico, the Migratory and Endangered Bird treaty with Japan, the Convention on Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation in the Northern Hemisphere, the International Convention for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.