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Re: Public Input on Proposed Rule Issues by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on Endangered and Threatened Species: Revision of Regulations for Prohibitions to Threatened Wildlife and Plants  
(Docket No. FWS-HQ-ES-2018-0007-0001)

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to you today on behalf of the nearly 7,000 members of the Entomological Society of America (the Society) regarding the "Revision of Regulations for Prohibitions to Threatened Wildlife and Plants" (Docket Number FWS-HQ-ES-2018-0007-0001).

While the Society recognizes that improvements could be made in the implementation and administration of the Endangered Species Act, we oppose the proposed changes to the regulations for threatened wildlife and plants. As written, in subpart D in part 15 of title 50 in the Code of Federal Regulations, agency officials are prohibited from killing or trapping threatened wildlife species unless acting on behalf of the agency for the expressed purpose of conservation. However, the proposed revision in the Federal Register notice would provide protections only for species listed as threatened prior to the enactment of the revised rule. Any species listed as threatened following the implementation of this rule would not receive such protections unless the "Service promulgates a species-specific rule."

The Society recognizes that the changes being proposed are intended to reduce burdensome and duplicative regulations, but the streamlining of the regulatory process should not come at the expense of our nation's biodiversity. By limiting protections for threatened species, whether newly listed or otherwise, species are put at greater risk for becoming endangered or extinct. Based on the language provided in the Federal Register, agency officials will no longer be prohibited from killing or trapping threatened animal species unless a species-specific rule has been put in place, which runs counter to the very mission of this legislation.

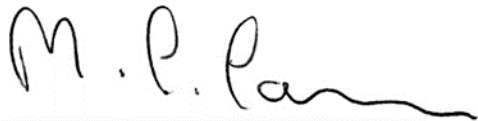
The current approach of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has been to extend the protections for endangered species to most threatened species unless altered by a specific regulation, as opposed to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), which has focused on regulations for individual species. While there is an opportunity to provide a more tailored approach to conservation, for a threatened species to receive protections under this law a new, species-specific rule would have to be established for each individual species instead of providing blanket protections under the law as written. From an entomological perspective, there is a clear bias in the listing process toward plants and vertebrates, and insect species stand to be disproportionately affected by the proposed regulatory change. Insects represent nearly 75 percent of all animal species, though only 84 species are listed as endangered or threatened, compared to 439 vertebrates.

The proposed rule change may have the conservation of threatened species in mind, but to withhold protections unless a species-specific rule is in place could have detrimental effects on threatened insect species that play a critical role in natural ecosystems, which could have unanticipated natural and economic consequences.

We recognize that the Endangered Species Act is not perfect as written, and changes could be made to streamline implementation and maximize investments in species conservation. However, the proposed changes do little to advance the objective of the Act, potentially revoking protections for vertebrates, plants, and insects that make critical contributions to our society and our economy. FWS should work with the scientific community as well as federal, state, and local conservation agencies to ensure that improvements are made to the benefit of the species in a streamlined, cost-effective, scientifically sound manner.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this issue. The Society and its many subject-matter experts remain a resource for the Agency, should you need input on any topic of entomological importance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. P. Parrella". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Michael Parrella, Ph.D.  
President, Entomological Society of America