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Save the Redwoods League Denounces the Removal of Habitat Destruction from the Federal Endangered Species Act's Definition of "Harm"

San Francisco, Calif. (September 10, 2026) — [Save the Redwoods League](#) strongly objects to the decision from the U.S. Department of the Interior and Department of Commerce to [remove habitat destruction as a valid source of "harm"](#) to endangered wildlife under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). By weakening the ESA in this fundamental way, the Trump Administration is eroding the sanctity of the nation's public lands and putting profit over the protection of landscapes critical to the survival of endangered species.

On July 10, 2026, the U.S. Department of the Interior announced the finalization of a [revision to the regulatory definition of "harm"](#) within the federal ESA. This revision removes significant habitat modification or degradation as a prohibited method of harming endangered species; the revision also [redefines what is deemed "critical habitat,"](#) allowing economic interests to supersede conservation needs. This change will put countless endangered species at risk by opening their habitat to destructive activities like road building, logging and extractive industries like oil drilling and mining. This revision is set to go into effect on September 14, 2026.

Since its bipartisan passage in 1973, the federal Endangered Species Act has provided crucial safeguards ensuring America's most vulnerable wildlife and plant species avoid permanent extinction—a cause still supported by an [overwhelming majority of Americans](#). Often called the "crown jewel" of the nation's environmental legislation, the ESA has [saved 99% of the species under its protection](#) and prevented nearly 300 species from vanishing forever, including the bald eagle, gray wolf, humpback whale, grizzly bear and California condor. Habitat destruction is the primary existential threat to endangered species, robbing them of their ability to find food, shelter and mating partners. For more than 50 years, habitat destruction has been included in the federal ESA's broader definition of "harm," enabling the protection of landscapes and marine areas critical to the survival of these species. This has historically been one of the ESA's most powerful tools—preventing species loss before direct injury occurs.

Over 1,000 animal and plant species live in redwood ecosystems, including threatened and endangered species like the marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl. Over the years, the presence of these species has helped establish and strengthen conservation measures on public and private lands across the redwood range. With the federal ESA's definition of "harm" now altered to omit habitat destruction, many of these redwood landscapes will now potentially be at risk of development, pollution or unsustainable harvesting.

The Trump Administration has made attacking environmental laws and protected areas an imperative for years. With the recent [shrinking of national monuments](#), [disruptive construction](#) within national parks, the gutting of the [National Park Service](#) and [Forest Service](#), federal directives to [increase timber production](#), covert deals to [sell public lands to private developers](#), the proposal to [rescind the Roadless Rule](#) and now the weakening of the federal ESA, this Administration has made it clear that it views public lands and natural spaces as resources to be

exploited, not preserved, and has shown no intention of prioritizing the conservation of endangered species or their habitats over the pursuit of financial interests.

In California, where nearly all the remaining redwood range is found, state law is better positioned to resist federal incursions on environmental protections than those in other states. AB 1319 passed last year, enabling the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to provisionally declare a native species as protected if federal protection wanes. The California Endangered Species Act (CESA) is a robust law that provides significant safeguards for endangered wildlife that depend on redwood ecosystems to survive. However, CESA primarily defends against the “take” (hunting or capture) of endangered species and does not include mention of “harm” (habitat destruction or otherwise) in its statutory definition of “take.” With the dismantling of the federal ESA’s definition of “harm” and the lack of any definition of “harm” in CESA, there will be a gap in legislative habitat protection that could negatively impact California’s redwood landscapes.

Save the Redwoods is in talks with California officials, exploring options that will strengthen CESA and other regulatory measures to keep redwood ecosystems safe across the state regardless of federal actions. Our state laws must protect against habitat destruction in critical landscapes like redwood forests, which are essential to sustaining many threatened and endangered species. In addition, we will continue to track how timber harvest plans and habitat conservation plans are submitted and approved under this changed federal landscape and work with policymakers and communities to respond to any activities that take advantage of the gap in protection created by federal rollback.

Save the Redwoods also applauds the efforts of our conservation peers, including [Earthjustice](#), [Environmental Protection Information Center](#) and the groups represented by [Southern Environmental Law Center](#), to bring legal challenges to this change to the federal ESA. The Trump Administration lacks the scientific, legal and public support to justify this assault against environmental protections, and we must all do our part to ensure the public lands that belong to all Americans are not degraded.

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Save the Redwoods League

Save the Redwoods League revitalizes coast redwood and giant sequoia forests across California’s redwood range. In partnership with state and federal agencies, Tribes, and communities, we have conserved more than 220,000 acres in 76 parks and preserves and restored 37,000 acres. Our work bolsters carbon storage, strengthens wildfire resilience, benefits local economies, and safeguards iconic landscapes enjoyed by millions. For more information, visit [SaveTheRedwoods.org](https://www.savetheredwoods.org)