

The Improving Species Recovery Act of 2026

Senators Adam Schiff (D-CA) and Pete Ricketts (R-NE) are co-leading the Improving Species Recovery Act, a bipartisan bill to improve and modernize the implementation of the Endangered Species Act's species recovery efforts.

Senators Schiff and Ricketts are the Ranking Member and Chairman, respectively, of the EPW Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife. This legislation was inspired and informed by the Subcommittee's March 18, 2026, hearing titled, "Challenges and Opportunities with Implementing the Endangered Species Act." Working together, the Senators consulted with all three of the hearing witnesses to produce this bipartisan agreement on improving the way the federal government works to recover endangered and threatened wildlife species.

The bipartisan Improving Species Recovery Act would:

- **Incentivize Voluntary Conservation:** Encourages private landowners and states to protect species early by establishing clear standards for pre-listing conservation and defining how voluntary efforts influence listing and delisting decisions.
- **Reward Progress with Regulatory Relief:** Introduces measurable "conservation milestones" that, once achieved, grant landowners and agencies greater regulatory flexibility and priority access to conservation funding.
- **Improve Data and Transparency:** Mandates establishing a clear "baseline status" for species at the time of listing to reduce the risk of painful litigation and requires public reporting every three years to track recovery progress, species trends, and data gaps.
- **Modernize Permitting Approvals:** Directs FWS to expand digital tools (like IPaC) and explore AI technology to automate and fast-track interagency consultation and review processes while remaining in compliance with the law.

By enacting the provisions listed above, the legislation hopes to achieve the following outcomes:

- **Faster Species Recovery:** Focuses resources on clear, standardized, and measurable targets rather than open-ended protections.
- **Stronger Stakeholder Collaboration:** Builds trust with private landowners by offering regulatory certainty and flexibility in exchange for proactive voluntary conservation efforts through the use of conservation milestones.
- **Reduced Permitting Bottlenecks:** Embraces technology to expedite and automate routine permitting processes and interagency consultations when appropriate to eliminate backlogs and get projects that don't harm the environment built faster.
- **Less Confusion and Less Litigation:** By ensuring baseline status and conservation goals are clearly expressed up front and throughout the recovery process, the bill intends to reduce disagreements over the status of species and when delisting is appropriate.

There is bipartisan desire to see more species recovered, i.e., get them to the point where they are no longer considered to be threatened or endangered. Such listing decisions must be made in accordance with the law and the best available science. This bill adheres to this principle. This legislation modernizes ESA species recovery efforts, makes them more efficient, and more effectively recruits private individuals into recovery efforts.