

HR 1897: ESA Amendments Act of 2025

An Indigenous Lens

A Policy Brief by Earth Daughters

The Endangered Species Act & Tribal Nations

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) has been both a shield and a source of tension for Indigenous communities. For decades, tribal nations have wielded the ESA to defend culturally sacred species — Pacific salmon, grizzly bears, gray wolves, bald eagles whose survival is inseparable from treaty rights, ceremony, and thousands of years of reciprocal stewardship. Yet the ESA was drafted without recognizing tribal sovereignty, leaving Indian Country navigating a law that protects their relatives while ignoring their authority.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) — the accumulated wisdom of Indigenous peoples about the natural world has sustained species and ecosystems for millennia. Federal wildlife policy is only beginning to acknowledge this. **HR 1897 threatens to reverse that progress.**

HR 1897: Extinction Under the Guise of Optimization

The "ESA Amendments Act of 2025" would gut the protections that Indigenous communities depend on to safeguard sacred species and treaty-guaranteed rights. Framed as "optimization," this bill would:

- **Undermine tribal consultation** — HR 1897 weakens Section 7 consultations, the process that ensures federal actions do not harm imperiled species or the treaty rights tied to them. Tribes lose a critical lever for protecting sacred species on ancestral territories.
- **Weaponize "tribal data" language against Indigenous interests** — The bill claims to include tribal government data in best-available science, but creates a presumption that any state, tribal, or local data qualifies without quality standards. This could elevate politically motivated data over rigorous Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
- **Gut habitat protections on and near ancestral lands** — By making critical habitat designation harder, the bill threatens the rivers, forests, and prairies Indigenous peoples have tended since time immemorial and that are home to treaty-protected species.
- **Accelerate delisting of culturally sacred species** — Fast-tracking removal of ESA protections endangers salmon, wolves, grizzly bears, and other beings whose presence is central to ceremony, nutrition, and spiritual life in tribal nations across the country.
- **Expand "take permits" in treaty territories** — Loosening review of permits that allow developers to harm or kill listed species directly threatens tribal hunting, fishing, and gathering rights guaranteed by treaty rights no legislation can override.
- **Erode science-based decision making** — By extending deadlines for listing species that urgently need protection while fast-tracking removal of protections, the bill privileges economic interests over the ecological relationships Indigenous communities uphold.

What's at Stake?

Indigenous peoples steward 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity with less than 5% of the global population. That relationship is the living result of Traditional Ecological Knowledge passed across generations.

Sacred species are relatives, not resources. Salmon, wolves, grizzly bears, and eagles carry spiritual and ceremonial significance no permit number can capture.

Treaty rights are on the line. Weakening habitat protections for salmon rivers or fast-tracking delisting of treaty species means tribal nations lose legally guaranteed ways of life.

Extinction is irreversible. Once a sacred species is gone, no future legislation can bring it back. The time to protect is now.

TAKE ACTION

Contact your representatives today. Demand they oppose HR 1897 and protect the sacred relationship between Indigenous peoples and the living world.

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