

Trump EPA Seeks to Slash Pesticide Protections for Imperiled Wildlife

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today released a set of proposed [changes](#) that would dramatically reduce protections for the nation's most endangered plants and animals from pesticides known to harm them. The proposals ignore the real-world, science-based assessments of pesticides' harms, instead relying on arbitrary industry-created models.

The EPA proposals would, for example, gut protections for endangered plants that are pollinated by butterflies and other insects by ignoring the fact that animals routinely move back and forth between agricultural areas and places where endangered species live.

Today's proposals follow intensive efforts by Interior secretary David Bernhardt to halt federal work on protecting wildlife from pesticides.

"The federal government's own science indicates this disgraceful proposal could drive endangered butterflies, birds and hundreds of other species to extinction," said Lori Ann Burd, environmental health director at the Center for Biological Diversity. "The pesticide industry asked Trump to kill protections from harmful pesticides, and Interior chief Bernhardt and the EPA's pesticide office are quickly pulling the trigger."

The proposed change comes over a year after a draft biological opinion that was scuttled by the Trump administration found that the loss of pollinators from the insecticide chlorpyrifos would put hundreds of endangered species on a path to extinction.

Today's so-called "refinements" will make it easier for the EPA to claim that pesticides have no effects on endangered species, allowing pesticides to remain on the market without common-sense restrictions on their use to protect endangered species.

The proposal disregards the [recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences](#) and ignores the mandate of the Endangered Species Act to give imperiled wildlife and plants the benefit of the doubt when evaluating the range of impacts caused by exposure to pesticides. Records obtained through the Freedom of Information Act show that the refinements were driven by political-level appointees at the EPA, Department of the Interior, Department of Commerce and the White House.

From 2013 to 2017 career scientists at the EPA and federal wildlife agencies worked to implement the recommendations of the National Academy of Science assessing the impacts of pesticides. This collaborative and transparent process was developed with hundreds of hours of stakeholder input. By 2017 the scientists were in the final stages of completing

their first-ever nationwide consultations on the impacts of three pesticides to protected species.

Documents obtained by the Center through the Freedom of Information Act [showed](#) that one of the pesticides, chlorpyrifos, jeopardizes the continued existence of 1,399 endangered plants and animals.

When then acting Interior secretary David Bernhardt was briefed on the results of those assessments in October 2017, he halted the release of the analysis. This [unprecedented effort](#) to scuttle endangered species consultations has spurred the EPA and wildlife agencies to attempt to justify their failure to release the analysis and take urgently needed action to save endangered animals like the San Joaquin kit fox from extinction.

The inspector general for the Department of the Interior [announced](#) last month it will open an investigation of Bernhardt's role in blocking the release of the scientific assessments. Bernhardt's efforts to suppress the assessments — revealed in the [documents](#) obtained by the Center — were highlighted in a *New York Times* [investigation](#) published last month.

"The EPA's proposal was created specifically to prevent endangered species from getting the protection they need from toxic pesticides," said Burd. "This sham promotes the pesticide industry's financial interests above saving endangered species, ignores the National Academy of Sciences recommendation and trashes years of work by career scientists to protect endangered wildlife from chlorpyrifos and other dangerous pesticides."

The EPA "refinements" were developed without transparency or any stakeholder feedback. Just four days prior to this document's release, the Center was [forced to sue](#) the EPA, Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, National Marine Fisheries Service and Council on Environmental Quality over their failure to produce records on the activities of a new interagency working group on pesticides and the Endangered Species Act.

The Center has also had to sue the EPA to obtain records on secret meetings between the agency and CropLife America — the pesticide industry lobbying arm — during the development of the revised methods.

"This disgusting proposal was crafted by political servants of the pesticide industry, the American Chemistry Council, the Koch brothers, American Petroleum Industry and Americans for Tax Reform," said Burd. "They are truly the A-Team of selling out our nation's natural environment to the highest bidder."

Bios on participants of the interagency working group on pesticides and the Endangered Species Act, including their prior affiliations, are available upon request.

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