



Outdoor News Bulletin

Conservation Without Conflict Key to Saving Endangered Species

By Lowell E. Baier and Christopher E. Segal | August 2024 | Volume 78, Issue 8

When we think of Conservation Without Conflict, threatened and endangered species may not spring to mind. Whether the [gray wolf](#) or the [delta smelt](#), federally-protected species are often sources of conflict. But in truth, both the history of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) and its application today show that the [Conservation Without Conflict model](#) is the best way to approach endangered species conservation.

The ESA was not conceived as a collaborative law, but its greatest successes have been achieved through collaboration. When the ESA was enacted, Members of Congress were focused on charismatic species such as the [grizzly bear](#), gray wolf, [whooping crane](#), [American peregrine falcon](#), and [bald eagle](#). They expected that simply protecting species, together with work by state and federal wildlife agencies, would be enough to reverse declines.

Early recovery plans reflected this, as did the federal whooping crane breeding program in [Patuxent, Maryland](#). But it turned out that partner and private efforts such as the [Peregrine Fund](#), [International Crane Foundation](#), zoo breeding programs, eagle nests and cams across the country, and other outside sources of land, resources, and enthusiasm were key factors in endangered species recovery (as was the Environmental Protection Agency's 1972 ban on DDT). The peregrine falcon was delisted in 1999, and the bald eagle followed in 2007.

Wolves, bears, and cranes are all still listed, as are 1,669 domestic species in total. But many are recovering thanks to collaborative conservation. This includes even controversial and conflict-prone species such as the grizzly bear and gray wolf. Both are benefiting through the Conservation Without Conflict approach, especially in the Blackfoot Valley of Montana.

There, the landowner-led [Blackfoot Challenge](#) is helping ranchers and other landowners coexist with expanding predator populations. The organization's mission is to coordinate efforts to conserve and enhance natural resources and the rural way of



life in the Blackfoot watershed for present and future generations. It believes that effective partnerships and working relationships are based on trust, respect, credibility, and the ability to empathize across a diversity of values, and it takes a strict non-advocacy and non-litigation approach to addressing local problems through which it has, over time, earned the trust and support of many local residents.

In the early 2000s, the group began managing local grizzly bear conflicts, which later expanded to include gray wolves. Working with local ranchers and outfitters, rather than ignoring them, the group set priorities that reflected the needs and values of the community, which included protecting human safety, protecting private property from bear damage, and protecting rural livelihoods. It developed conflict reduction programs including electric fencing to protect newborn calves, collection and composting of livestock carcasses to reduce bear attractants, sanitation and bear-proofing, outreach and education, and a neighbor-to-neighbor communication system.

The result was a 74% reduction in verified human-bear conflicts within their project area between 2003 and 2013 and a downward trend in known grizzly bear mortalities, even as the bear population increased by approximately 3% per year. Between 2013 and 2019, there were just 2.6 average annual confirmed and probable livestock losses to grizzly bears out of a population of 16,000 to 18,000 head of livestock. When similar tools were applied to gray wolf management between 2006 and 2015, confirmed livestock losses to wolves averaged just 2.2 depredations per year.

The Blackfoot Challenge successfully managed the coexistence of large predators with commercial livestock operations through the participation and support of local landowners, the application of proven science, and support from a wide array of state and federal agencies, NGOs, and universities. They have been successful in Conservation Without Conflict.

There is much work to be done to expand this model across the country. Groups like the Blackfoot Challenge, or the Malpai Borderlands Group in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico, have developed outstanding approaches. But greater funding is needed for collaborative conservation, as are ESA regulatory flexibilities and appropriate incentives for private landowners. The private sector is an increasingly important source of funding for wildlife conservation, including companies that [voluntarily practice conservation](#), those that [fund it](#), and even [Wall Street](#) through sustainable investing.



In the past ten years, 201 new species have been listed under the ESA, while just 46 species were delisted due to recovery. Without ESA protection, many of our cherished species would have become extinct. But without increased collaboration, recovery will continue to stagnate. In the next fifty years, Conservation Without Conflict will be central to our ability to save both our species and the natural world.

This article is adapted from [Earth's Emergency Room: Saving Species as the Planet and Politics Get Hotter](#), by Lowell E. Baier (Rowman and Littlefield, 2024). Save 30% using code RLFANDF30.

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