

July 27, 2010

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico created a number of victims, including the wildlife of the region. No species are more vulnerable than those listed (or which deserve to be listed) under the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 (7 U.S.C. § 136, 16 U.S.C. § 1531 *et seq*).

The regulatory breakdown in the Gulf has led to a reorganization of the permitting agency, the Minerals Management Service. However, the dismal performance of a sister agency, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), deserves equal attention. FWS did not raise concerns about a single permit issued in the Gulf. And while this failure to adequately consider the effects of offshore oil drilling is reportedly under internal review, the inaction of FWS denotes a deeper dysfunction which demands your attention.

To be candid, the supine posture of FWS in the Gulf is typical of its approach throughout the nation. The agency has been consistently recalcitrant in carrying out its legal duties, especially those mandated by the Endangered Species Act. Unfortunately, the record of FWS under your administration has been barely distinguishable from its record during the Bush Administration.

The BP spill should be a wake-up call. We urge you to use the terrible ecological disaster in the Gulf as an opportunity to rethink your approach to endangered species issues and to dedicate your administration to the faithful and robust implementation and enforcement of the Endangered Species Act.

Meaningful change requires leadership. You are in the process of selecting for nomination to the U.S. Senate the next Director of the Fish & Wildlife Service. This person will be crucial to ending the business-as-usual approach currently adopted by the FWS, and to putting this vital agency on track towards providing meaningful wildlife benefits for the country as opposed to merely presiding over the demise of its biodiversity.

In order to revitalize this agency, your nominee must be a break from its past failed leadership. He or she must be an individual who recognizes the alarming loss of habitat and dire plight of wildlife in America. Above all, your nominee should be someone who is truly dedicated to the promise of the Endangered Species Act.

Politics is called the art of the possible. And yet sometimes politics encourages a path of least resistance in order to husband political capital. The nightmare in the Gulf, however, is a cry demanding a more vigorous path, one that braves the immediate political hurdles of Senate confirmation and leads the way towards an improved natural legacy for generations to come.

Your pick for this important post will signal whether any lessons have been learned from recent events. We implore you to choose wisely.

Sincerely,

Jeff Ruch
Executive Director

Cc. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar