

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4311

August 30, 2023

Martha Williams
Director
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Director Williams,

I write to urge the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to hold a public hearing in the Permian Basin regarding the proposed listing of the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. Further federal overreach in listing the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard poses an existential threat to our nation's energy independence and national security, and it is imperative that the Service hear directly from the community it will impact most.

As you know, the Permian Basin is the largest secure supply of energy in the world, providing nearly 40 percent of all oil production in the United States and nearly 15 percent of its natural gas production. The Service's proposed listing, which lacks meaningful scientific data on habitat decline, is another blatant effort by the Biden administration to hamper American energy production.

In a recent oversight hearing before the House Committee on Natural Resources, you claimed to be an "advocate for renewable energy." Therefore, it is important to highlight that while the Permian Basin has produced the lion's share of oil and gas production in the country, the region is also a leader in renewable energy development. In fact, renewable energy in west Texas has the potential to provide power for over 9 million homes. Unfortunately, the proposed listing of the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard will have an outsized impact on future renewable energy development as projects will face steep regulatory hurdles.

As you know, there have been tremendous state and private conservation initiatives to protect the sagebrush lizard. As of the end of 2022, millions of acres were enrolled in Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCA) and Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) by the ranching and oil and gas communities to protect the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard. These enrollments have resulted in habitat gain and the associated financial pledges have funded many reclamation and conservation programs to facilitate the conservation of the species while still allowing for the development of resources in the area.

A report on the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard done at the end of 2022 showed a net conservation gain for the species.¹ These private and state-led conservation efforts are working, yet the Service still listed the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard. It is the Service's duty to hear from the Permian Basin community regarding their successful conservation efforts, as well as the impacts this listing will have on economic growth and development throughout the community.

¹ Acre, M. R. and M. T. Hill. 2023. Demographic monitoring of the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard (*Sceloporus arenicolus*) in New Mexico: 2022. Report to Center of Excellence dba CEHMM. 17 pp.

During the aforementioned House Committee on Natural Resources hearing, you told me that you have not visited the Permian Basin. I believe a public hearing in the Midland or Odessa area to be the ideal opportunity to remedy that, while performing sufficient community engagement—a vital aspect of the Endangered Species Act. Additionally, as promised during your appearance before the Committee, the Service has not shared the list of peer-reviewed group representatives and their affiliations that examined the Species-Specific Assessment. Please provide these in a timely fashion. I look forward to working with the Service to continue the conservation gain of this species, while protecting the critical contributions of the Permian Basin to our national security.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "August Pfluger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping tail.

August Pfluger
Member of Congress