

Protect Endangered Species Oppose HB5293 (Costello)

This legislation jeopardizes endangered species by weakening the expert composition of the Endangered Species-Protection Board and eliminates certain requirements for permits, notice, and public hearings.

Background

The Endangered Species Protection Board has protected plants and animals since 1972 with a board that relies on science. Under the Act, “The Board shall be composed of 9 persons appointed by the Governor, and the Director as a non-voting member. Of the 9 appointed members at least 6 shall be persons who are recognized as naturalists by training, avocation or vocation. At least two of these shall be zoologists, at least one a botanist, and at least two ecologists.”

Amends the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board by designating two seats to agricultural interests unqualified to make decisions on the science of protecting endangered species.

The proposed bill would allow farm organization board members to promote the interests of agricultural landowners rather than relying on scientifically-based measures to conserve and manage endangered species in Illinois. This conflict of interest would be detrimental to protecting “species of plants and animals native to Illinois which are in danger of being lost from the wild in the state” as required by the statute.

- This would create a precedent, allowing other special interest groups to legislatively seek seats on the Board.
- The Act creating the Board is very clear that the Board’s decisions relative to listing need to be based on “scientific evidence” (520 ILCS 10/7), and adding seats based on their affiliation and not expertise shows preferential deference to one group over all others.
- All Board members should have relevant scientific experience and knowledge as stated in the act.

Alters public notice requirements when a species is added to the Endangered Species list. These changes could allow Illinois to delay or stop the listing of federally endangered species in Illinois.

Weakens state regulations that protect endangered species because the bill would remove the requirement to obtain 'incidental takings' permit from the state in the event of species and/or habitat destruction. This would assure that Illinois defers to the Trump Administration to decide when Illinois' endangered species are 'incidentally taken'.

The termination of the requirement of a permit for incidental take of federal endangered species in Illinois may jeopardize the populations of those species within the state. Some federally endangered/threatened species may be more abundant in areas outside of Illinois, but their populations may be low within the state. The state would lose the ability to effectively manage those species.

Opposed by the Illinois Environmental Council, Illinois Audubon Society, Illinois Environmental Council, The Nature Conservancy, Prairie State Conservation Coalition, Openlands, Bird Conservation Network, and several other conservation organizations.

Contact Colleen Smith, colleen@ilenviro.org, 309-643-0298 or Jen Walling, jwalling@ilenviro.org, 217-493-9455