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A Government Shutdown Would Hamper Vital Work for Vulnerable Wildlife Species

A National Nonprofit's Conservation Efforts for Imperiled Amphibians and Reptiles Would Be Set Back by a Shutdown

UNITED STATES, September 26, 2023 - If the possible government shutdown becomes a reality, the impacts on vulnerable wildlife species in the US could be significant. Not only will the critical activities of federal natural resource agencies come to a halt, but partner organizations and entities working on species recovery and other efforts will be unable to carry out their work. The Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC), a national nonprofit to conserve imperiled wildlife, is watching the situation closely with concern about the effects of a shutdown on its programs for threatened and endangered species.

“If National Forests, Wildlife Refuges, Parks, and other public lands are forced to close, and their employees are furloughed, we will be hampered in our ability to carry out targeted conservation efforts for species that are already running out of time,” ARC Executive Director JJ Apodaca explained. “And timing is key for many of these efforts, such as the protection of turtle eggs during nesting season.”

ARC partners closely with federal agencies on its large-scale conservation efforts. More than 80% of ARC's targeted actions for imperiled species are currently taking place on public lands. The organization's national strategy is implemented in hundreds of locations across the US called Priority Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Areas, or PARCAs.

ARC's scientists selected the 317 PARCAs identified to date because they are critical strongholds for threatened and endangered amphibians and reptiles, one of the most vulnerable groups of vertebrates in the US. Given that wildlife species do not confine their ranges to boundaries on maps, PARCAs incorporate both public and private lands, including National Forests, Bureau of Land Management land, and agricultural lands.

“A government shutdown would reduce our ability to coordinate with and access many of the federal lands that house several of our high-priority species, ones that are most critically imperiled, and they may not have another year for delayed conservation action,” said ARC National Programs Coordinator José Garrido.

Case in point, ARC's work in the Francis Marion PARCA in South Carolina takes place nearly entirely on National Forest land. In a crucial program here, the organization is partnering with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, and other agencies and entities to work to save the state-listed endangered gopher frog.

In this program, the frogs are headstarted, which means that ARC biologists collect gopher frog eggs from temporary wetlands in the National Forest and take them to a National Fish Hatchery where they're hatched and reared until they metamorphose (change) into frogs. Then, the young frogs are released back into the wild. Raising them past their most vulnerable stages gives them a greater chance at survival. However, during a shutdown, ARC biologists would not be able to collect eggs. Plus, a prolonged shutdown could result in the cessation of certain nonessential operations at the National Fish Hatchery, which may affect efforts for gopher frogs.

Not only are targeted actions at risk of being affected, but the scientific research needed for effective species conservation is as well. “We rely on long-term species monitoring datasets to inform our conservation actions,” said Apodaca. “If data collection is interrupted, the quality of our data could be undermined, and the creation of the models and other data-based tools we need will be delayed or, worse, we could miss out entirely on time-sensitive data during important seasonal events.”

Plus, the vast and vital work of federal agencies for wildlife conservation would be halted, including for the more than 1,300 species protected under the Endangered Species Act and the many more awaiting decisions on listing. ARC Director of Private Lands and Policy Kat Diersen said, “Not only will sensitive species face increased risk of harm and habitat degradation in the absence of oversight from federal land managers and enforcement staff, they will also suffer from the disruption of programs and policy work aimed at restoring and protecting their populations.”

The suspension of government programs, together with the postponement of the efforts of partner organizations like ARC, could be a big setback for at-risk species. “A large number of imperiled species are barely hanging on,” said Apodaca. “The length of this possible shutdown could mean the difference between some of these species being given their best chance to persist into the future – or not.”

About Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC)

Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy, or ARC, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on identifying and conserving the highest priority places for amphibians and reptiles in the United States. We protect endangered amphibians and reptiles through a strategic, scientific, and passionate approach. We believe the conservation of amphibians, reptiles, and the habitats they depend on is vitally important. To learn more, visit ARCProtects.org.

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