

Op/Ed: Urge US senators to pass RAWA, save wildlife species near extinction in Indiana

Dan Boritt and Collin O'Mara

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The Hoosier state is home to some of America's most cherished wildlife. Today, Indiana has more than 150 species that are at a heightened risk of extinction. Extinction is forever; the time to act is when animals are plentiful. We need to address the threats leading to extinction: from habitat loss and fragmentation to invasive species and degraded water quality.

What is happening here in Indiana is part of a larger national trend where more than one-third of America's wildlife are edging toward extinction. Fortunately, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to help save Indiana's incredibly rich biodiversity through a bipartisan bill in Congress called the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA). The bill is designed to fund proactive, collaborative and locally led efforts to help recover at-risk fish, wildlife and plant species. Indiana could receive more than \$18 million annually. It's a solution that matches the magnitude of the wildlife crisis.



The RAWA has significant bipartisan momentum. The House passed the bill in June in a bipartisan manner. The bill has more than 30 co-sponsors in

the Senate, including 16 Republicans. Indiana's Congressional delegation may hold the key to RAWA's fate, and we need our members of Congress to help bring this vital funding back home to Indiana.

Here's why the bill makes sense for Indiana: We can build upon the locally driven and collaborative successes that have been the hallmark of Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR). For decades, DNR has done innovative work with the fees and taxes paid by Hoosier hunters and anglers to restore species like wild turkey, bald eagle, river otter and white-tailed deer.

Today, there isn't the same type of funding to help at-risk species like the Indiana bat. During the summer, an Indiana bat will eat as many as 3,000 insects every evening, including mosquitos and many crop pests.

Unfortunately, disturbance of the caves Indiana bats depend on has led to significant population declines and ultimately required a listing under the Endangered Species Act. The newest threat is white-nose syndrome, a fungus that has caused unprecedented mortality in many bat species and has now been discovered in 38 caves throughout the state. Now more than ever, Indiana bats need RAWA to fund conservation efforts like helping to recover remnant populations and researching innovative strategies to stop the disease.

That's where this legislation comes in. RAWA gives Indiana the financial means it needs to prioritize proactive, local collaboration and innovation. This bill will give Indiana the ability to save our full spectrum of wildlife now and avoid federal regulation that comes with federal listing. RAWA is the ultimate ounce of prevention.

The \$18 million annually for Indiana would unleash a new era of conservation for bobwhite quail, migrating waterfowl, loggerhead shrike, Blanding's turtles, lake sturgeon, osprey, banded pigmy sunfish, cerulean warblers, green salamanders and timber rattlesnakes.

This collaborative, nonregulatory, locally driven approach of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act should appeal to the common-sense conservatism of

Sens. Todd Young and Mike Braun. We're hopeful that each member of the Indiana delegation will support it once it is on the floor.

After all, what would Indiana be without its wildlife? Outdoor recreation generates over \$9.4 billion annually for Indiana's economy, and this recreation is dependent on healthy wildlife. Our state has awe-inspiring public lands and waterways, but without our majestic wildlife these amazing spaces will lose much of their magic.

Inaction is the ally of extinction. We urge Indiana's leaders to seize this incredible opportunity to save wildlife through collaboration by helping to pass the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. We need all Hoosiers to call Sen. Young and Sen. Braun and implore them to vote for wildlife by supporting the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.





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