

**The Entirety of Creation:  
A Jewish Call to Protect the Endangered Species Act  
September 2005**

The passage of the Endangered Species Act thirty-two years ago marked a moment of great human nobility. To save from extinction species identified by scientists as gravely threatened by human activity, the American people provided resources for research, planning, and enforcement to preserve imperiled plants and wildlife and the places they call home. As a result, many of the frailest elements of the North American web of life were spared final destruction and given a chance at rebirth. Of more than 1,800 species under the Endangered Species Act's protections during the past three decades, only nine have been declared extinct — a remarkable record of the Act's positive impact. This represents stewardship in keeping with America's great conservation heritage.

Today, however, the Endangered Species Act is itself endangered by impatience, ideology, and shortsighted, even deceptive, policymaking. Some organizations and members of Congress have been seeking to weaken its habitat protections, hamper the processes of identifying and listing fragile species, politicize what is supposed to be scientific decision-making, and otherwise alter the law in ways that would violate its beneficent vision and set back its accomplishments.

Distinguished voices from diverse communities are forging unique partnerships to prevent such action. Religious leaders and scientists, who may have different visions of how and why the Earth originated, are together affirming a universal moral imperative to protect all life on Earth. And in religious life itself, across traditional and often challenging denominational and ideological boundaries, people of faith are discerning a mandate for stewardship of creation deeply embedded in biblical scripture and commentary.

In this spirit, therefore, and in full agreement with a recent statement by the Academy of Evangelical Scientists and Ethicists, which calls upon religious communities to

emulate “the biblical example of Noah as a model for being faithful to God’s call to protect endangered species from extinction,” we seek here to affirm the Jewish community’s longstanding commitment to protect biological diversity. We also affirm our conviction that the Endangered Species Act is one of our generation’s richest fulfillments of our biblical destiny as *b'tselem elohim*, created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26), with the unique power and responsibility to shape, preserve, and renew creation through the work of our hands, our hearts, and our minds.

Jewish texts clearly state that all species deserve our wonder and protection. “Of all that the Holy One created in the world, not a single thing is useless,” teaches the Talmud (B. Shabbat 77b), while the Midrash elaborates, “Even those creatures that you may look upon as superfluous in the world . . . they too are part of the entirety of creation. The Holy One effects purpose through all creatures, even through a snake, a scorpion, a gnat, a frog” (Genesis Rabbah 10: 7). Every species of plant or animal is thus understood by Jewish tradition to occupy an ecological niche in our interdependent, living world.

Furthermore, Jewish tradition puts preservation of the environment squarely on our shoulders. “Do not spoil My world, for if you do, there is nobody to fix it after you” (Kohelet Rabbah 7: 13).

Today, in a time of marvelous innovation and discovery, science has given the ancient environmental wisdom of Judaism new strength and meaning. Genetics, ecology, taxonomy, medicine, and other sciences all indicate that life is an interconnected web whose diversity of species is an irreplaceable boon to human health and well-being. Gene research and genome mappings have shown how every creature and plant carries within it a life-urge that is eons older than any scripture. The ongoing discovery of new species, and those rare instances when we learn that species we thought extinct cling to survival, point to the strength of the life-urge and its capacity for renewal — if we humans will only seek to transcend our baser natures and rise to our religious, ethical, and legal responsibilities of stewardship, both individually and collectively. But, as noted by the Ecological Society of America, a professional society representing more than 8,000

scientists around the world, “The loss of biological diversity that we are currently observing is unprecedented.”

Two great disciplines, religion and science, have pointed us in the direction of universal values and wise policy. Science points the way with trail markers of objectivity and understanding. Religion then offers tools with which to discipline ourselves to put aside greed, self-deceit, and narrow self-interest, and to embrace, instead, the profound responsibilities assigned to us as the guardians of creation. Rabbi Elijah Gaon, the 18<sup>th</sup> century sage of Vilna, taught that: “Torah and science are intertwined.” The Jewish people have a long, proud history of fulfilling his teaching — as innovators in the scientific community and as believers in science as a pathway to human dignity.

We are particularly disturbed, therefore, by criticisms of the Endangered Species Act that undermine the role of science in environmental decision-making. Recent legislative initiatives and policy reports have distorted statistics, used unrealistic timetables, questioned the integrity of scientists, and couched themselves in pseudo-scientific language in ways that amount to what the Jewish tradition calls *g'neivat da'at*, stealing the mind. We urge instead that discussion of the Endangered Species Act's ongoing relationship to species recovery, land use, economic development, political ideology, and other concerns be conducted as “controversy for the sake of heaven,” which the Jewish tradition describes as having “lasting value” (Pirke Avot 5: 19). Surely the goals of the Endangered Species Act are goals “for the sake of heaven,” with value that stretches deep into our past and holds profound promise for our future. In July 2004, more than 400 members of the scientific community wrote members of Congress, expressing “serious unease with proposals in Congress that may undermine the integrity of science and thus further distort or hamper endangered species conservation decisions.”

We call upon U.S. policymakers to emulate the forethought, self-restraint, and prodigious effort modeled by the biblical Noah — “a righteous man . . . blameless in his age” (Genesis 6: 9). While the Bible says little about the actual labors that Noah and his family endured to save Earth's countless species from the floods of extinction,

the 16<sup>th</sup> century *Midrash Tanhuma* portrays him as a man of foresight who planted and cultivated cedar trees over the course of a century — all the while planning the construction of his cedarwood ark and withstanding the mockery of his neighbors.

To us, the Endangered Species Act is the legislative equivalent of Noah's cedar grove. We are determined, with our allies in other faith communities, to see it maintained and strengthened as a resource for building our environmental future.

Signed,  
(as of November 23, 2005\*)

**Rabbis**

*Rabbi Joel N. Abraham*, Temple Sholom, Fanwood, NJ

*Rabbi Rebecca T. Alpert*, Associate Professor of Religion and Women's Studies, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

*Rabbi Tom Alpert*, Ohabei Shalom, Brookline, MA

*Rabbi Melanie Aron*, Congregation Shir Hadash, Los Gatos, CA

*Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson*, Dean of Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, University of Judaism, Los Angeles, CA

*Rabbi Annie Belford*, Congregation Shaare Emeth, St. Louis, Missouri

*Rabbi Donald Berlin*, Rabbi Emeritus, Temple Oheb Shalom, Baltimore, MD

*Rabbi Saul Berman*, Director, *Edah*, New York, NY

*Rabbi Edward C. Bernstein*, Shaarey Tikvah Congregation, Beachwood, OH

*Rabbi Linda Bertenthal*, Associate Director, Union for Reform Judaism, Pacific Southwest Council, Encino, CA

*Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard*, Director of Organizational Development, National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, New York, NY

*Rabbi Joshua Chasan*, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Burlington, VT

*Rabbi Jeff Clopper*, Temple Beth El, Huntington, NY

*Rabbi Mike Comins*, Founder, TorahTrek, Los Angeles, CA

*Rabbi Scott Corngold*, Temple Emanu-El, Lynbrook, NY

*Rabbi Rachel Cowan*, Director, Institute for Jewish Spirituality, Northampton, MA

**Jewish Community Statement on the Endangered Species Act  
September 2005**

*Rabbi Harry K. Danziger*, President, Central Conference of American Rabbis,  
Germantown, TN

*Rabbi James S. Diamond*, Director, Center for Jewish Life, Princeton University,  
Princeton, NJ

*Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb*, Adat Shalom, Reconstructionist Congregation, Bethesda,  
MD

*Rabbi Elliot Dorff*, Professor of Philosophy, University of Judaism, Los Angeles, CA

*Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz*, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Wyncote, PA

*Rabbi David Ellenson*, President, Hebrew Union College/Jewish Institute of Religion,  
New York, NY

*Rabbi David Feder*, Tree of Life Congregation, Morgantown, WV

*Rabbi Marla J. Feldman*, Commission on Social Action for Reform Judaism, New York,  
NY

*Rabbi Michael Fessler*, Congregation BH'nai Tikvah, Sewell, NJ

*Rabbi Ruth Gais*, Director, NY Kollell and Community Outreach, New York, NY

*Rabbi Dov Gartenberg*, Panim Hadashot: New Faces of Judaism, Seattle, WA

*Rabbi Gail Glicksman*, Dean of Students and Assistant Professor, Reconstructionist  
Rabbinical College, Wyncote, PA

*Rabbi Arthur Green*, Director, Rabbinical School at Hebrew College, Newton  
Centre, MA

*Rabbi Irving Greenberg*, President, Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation, New  
York, NY

*Rabbi David Gordis*, President, Hebrew College, Newton, MA

*Rabbi Jennifer Gormon*, Family Educator, Beth Tzedec Congregation, Toronto, ON

*Rabbi Steve Gutow*, Executive Director, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, New York,  
NY

*Rabbi Jill Hammer*, Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project, New York, NY

*Rabbi Richard Hirsh*, President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, Wyncote, PA

*Rabbi Mark Hurvitz*, Congregation Etz Chaim, Ramona, CA

*Rabbi Bruce Kadden*, Temple Beth El, Tacoma, WA

*Rabbi Shoshana Kaminsky*, Beth Samuel Jewish Center, Ambridge, PA

*Rabbi Alan J Katz*, Temple Sinai, Rochester, NY

**Jewish Community Statement on the Endangered Species Act  
September 2005**

*Rabbi Jan Caryl Kaufman*, the Rabbinical Assembly, New York, NY  
*Rabbi Norman Koch*, Temple Sholom, New Milford, CT  
*Rabbi Elissa Sachs-Kohen*, Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, Baltimore, MD  
*Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff*, Vice President, Hebrew Union College, New York, NY  
*Rabbi Nancy Fuchs Kreimer*, Associate Professor and Director of Religious Studies,  
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Wyncote, PA  
*Rabbi Ebn Leader*, Director of Bet-Midrash, Rabbinical School at Hebrew College,  
Newton, MA  
*Rabbi Allan Lehmann*, Jewish Chaplain and Rabbinic Hillel Director, Brandeis  
University, Waltham, MA  
*Rabbi Michele Lenke*, Co-President, Women's Rabbinic Network, Boston, MA  
*Rabbi Amy Levin*, Temple Torat Yisrael, Cranston, RI  
*Rabbi Sue E. Levy*, Webster, TX  
*Rabbi Patricia Karlin-Neumann*, Senior Associate Dean for Religious Life, Stanford  
University, Stanford, CA  
*Rabbi Mecklenburger*, Beth-El Congregation, Fort Worth, TX  
*Rabbi David J. Meyer*, Temple Emanu-El, Marblehead, MA  
*Rabbi Michael Namath*, Program Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism,  
Washington, DC  
*Rabbi Stephen Pearce*, Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco, CA  
*Rabbi Larry Raphael*, Congregation Sherith Israel, San Francisco, CA  
*Rabbi Rayzel Raphael*, Spirituality Consultant, Institute for Jewish Women's Spirituality  
*Rabbi Perry Raphael Rank*, President, The Rabbinical Assembly, New York, NY  
*Rabbi Moti Rieber*, Congregation Beth Shalom, Naperville IL  
*Rabbi Sanford E. Rosen*, Emeritus at Peninsula Temple Beth El, San Mateo, CA  
*Rabbi Joseph R. Rosenbloom*, Rabbi Emeritus, Temple Emanuel, St. Louis, MO  
*Rabbi David Rosenn*, Executive Director, AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps, New  
York, NY  
*Rabbi Morton M. Rosenthal*, Retired, Pennington, NJ  
*Rabbi David Saperstein*, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism,  
Washington, DC  
*Rabbi Marna Sapsowitz*, Temple Beth Hatfiloh, Olympia, WA

**Jewish Community Statement on the Endangered Species Act  
September 2005**

*Rabbi Amy Scheinerman*, Beth Shalom Congregation, Taylorsville, MD  
*Rabbi Ismar Schorsch*, Chancellor, Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, NY  
*Rabbi Amy Schwartzman*, Temple Rodef Shalom, New York, NY  
*Rabbi Judy Shanks*, Co-President, Women's Rabbinical Network, Lafayette, CA  
*Rabbi Randy Sheinberg*, Temple Emanuel, New Hyde Park, NY  
*Rabbi Arnold I. Sher*, Interim Executive Vice President, Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York, NY  
*Rabbi Jonathan P. Slater*, Institute for Jewish Spirituality, New York, NY  
*Rabbi Toba Spitzer*, Congregation Dorshei Tzedek, West Newton, MA  
*Rabbi David Steinberg*, Associate Rabbi, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue, Burlington, VT  
*Rabbi Andrew Straus*, Temple Emanuel of Tempe, Tempe, AZ  
*Rabbi Warren G. Stone*, Temple Emanuel, Kensington, MD  
*Rabbi Tziona Szajman*, Congregation Rodeph Shalom, Bridgeport, CT  
*Rabbi Elliott Tepperman*, Bnai Keshet, Montclair, NJ  
*Rabbi David A. Teutsch*, Professor of Contemporary Jewish Civilization, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Wyncote, PA  
*Rabbi Lawrence Troster*, Rabbinic Fellow, Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, Teaneck, NJ  
*Rabbi Gordon Tucker*, Temple Israel Center, White Plains, NJ  
*Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg*, Institute for Jewish Spirituality, New York, NY  
*Rabbi Heidi Waldmann*, Temple Beth Israel, Plattsburgh, NY  
*Rabbi Barbara Goldman-Wartell*, Director of Community Services, Jewish Federation of Lehigh Valley, Allentown, PA & Congregations B'nai Harim, Pocono Pines, PA  
*Rabbi Pamela Wax*, Spiritual Care Coordinator, Westchester Jewish Community Services, Hartsdale, NY  
*Rabbi Deobrah Waxman*, Vice President for Governance, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Wyncote, PA  
*Rabbi Sylvan L. Wolf*, Naples Jewish Center, Naples, FL  
*Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie*, President, Union for Reform Judaism, New York, NY  
*Rabbi Shawn Zevit*, Senior Consultant, Director of Outreach & External Affiliation, Brit Kehillah, Ekins Park, PA

## **Scientists**

*James Aronson*, Ph.D., Centre d'Ecologie Fonctionnelle et Evolutive, Montpellier, France

*Peter J. Auster*, Ph.D., Science Director, National Undersea Research Center, University of Connecticut, Groton CT

*David E. Blockstein*, Ph.D., Chair, the Ornithological Council, Washington, DC

*Devra Davis*, Ph.D., M.P.H., Director, Center for Environmental Oncology, University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, Pittsburgh, PA

*Michael Dine*, Professor, Department of Physics, University of California, Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA

*Paul R. Ehrlich*, Ph.D., Bing Professor of Population Studies and President, Center for Conservation Biology, Stanford University, Stanford, CA

*David W. Ehrenfeld*, M.D., Ph.D. Professor of Ecology, Evolution, and Natural Resources, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

*Joan G. Ehrenfeld*, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Ecology, Evolution and Natural Resources, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

*Barry D. Gold*, D.Sc., Program Officer, Conservation and Science, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Los Altos Hills, CA

*Rebecca Goldberg*, Ph.D., Environmental Defense, New York, NY

*Robert P Goode*, Professor, Department of Biology, City College of New York, New York, NY

*Peter H. Gleick*, Ph.D., President, Pacific Institute, Oakland, CA, *MacArthur Fellow*

*Steven N. Handel*, Ph.D., Professor of Ecology, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

*Michael Hecht*, Professor and Associate Chair, Department of Chemistry, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

*Roald Hoffmann*, Ph.D., Frank H.T. Rhodes Professor of Humane Letters, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY *1981 Nobel Prize in Chemistry*

*Les Kaufman*, Ph.D., Professor of Biology, Boston University, Boston, MA

*Anna Lokshin*, PhD, University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, Pittsburgh, PA

*Alan I. Leshner*, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer and Executive Publisher, Science, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington, DC

*Simon Levin*, Ph.D., Professor of Biology, Director, Center for Biocomplexity, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

*Marc Mangel*, Ph.D., Professor of Mathematical Biology; University of California, Santa Cruz, CA

*Philip Needleman*, Ph.D., former member of the Council of the National Academy of Sciences, St. Louis, MO

*Elliott A. Norse*, Ph.D., President, Marine Conservation Biology Institute, Bellevue, WA

*Ellen K. Pikitch*, Ph.D., Professor and Executive Director, Pew Institute for Ocean Science, University of Miami, New York, NY

*Andrew A. Rosenberg*, Ph.D., Professor of Natural Resources, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH

*Daniel I. Rubenstein*, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

*Vera Rubin*, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, Department of Terrestrial Magnetism, Carnegie Institution, Washington, DC

*S.H. Sohmer*, Ph.D., Fort Worth, TX

*Michael E. Soulé*, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Environmental Studies, University of California at Santa Cruz, CA, Hotchkiss, CO

*Thomas G. Spiro*, Ph.D., Chemistry Dept., Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

*Gary M. Tabor*, V.M.D., M.E.M., Program Director, Wilburforce Foundation, Bozeman, MT

*Alan R. Templeton*, Ph.D., Professor of Biology, Washington University, St. Louis, MO

*Mitchell S. Thomashow*, Ph.D., Antioch New England Graduate School, Keene, NH

*Judith S. Weis*, Ph.D., Professor of Biological Science, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ

*Peddrick Weiss*, DDS, Professor of Radiology g-621, New Jersey Medical School, Newark, NJ

*David S. Wilcove*, Ph.D., Professor of Ecology, Evolutionary Biology, and Public Affairs, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

\* (affiliations are for identification purposes only)