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United States Senate

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May 6, 2016

Mr. Daniel Ashe
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW, Room 3331
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Dear Director Ashe,

I want to commend you on the steps you have taken to thoughtfully research and consider delisting the American burying beetle (ABB) as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Routinely evaluating whether species still meet the requirements of a listed species under the ESA is critical to ensuring that population levels return to sustainable levels, while also ensuring frivolous costs are not added to development projects, which ultimately limits the potential for economic growth.

When the American burying beetle was listed as an endangered species in 1989 it was based on a then-recent population decline of the beetle. According to surveys at the time, there were only two known populations of the American burying beetle: one located in Eastern Oklahoma with a population of only 12 beetles, and the other on an island off the coast of Rhode Island with a population of 520 beetles.

It was not until 2008, 17 years later, and the first five-year review of the beetle's listing was performed. The total beetle population in recovery areas exceeded the target established under the initial 1991 recovery plan, but the beetle remained listed due to numbers in its historical geographical range.

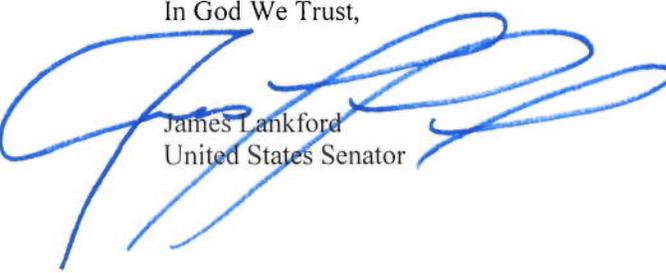
Today, the population of the American burying beetle in Nebraska, an area with no known beetles at the original time of listing, is estimated to contain well over 3,000 beetles, and the population has also grown in Oklahoma where the beetle now exists in 45 of its 77 counties. Beetle sightings are now commonplace in Oklahoma, but are dreaded by anyone developing land as they signal costly mitigation measures.

The presence of a listed species has a real impact on local economies and infrastructure projects. One town in Oklahoma is currently working to expand a lake through construction of a dam, but mitigation measures required under the ESA for the ABB is inflating project costs by millions of dollars. While as stewards of the land we must take care of our resources, as federal regulators and lawmakers we must also ensure that requirements are only put in place when they are truly needed. Given the robust population of the ABB in the state mitigation measures would not be money well spent; instead, they unnecessarily add financial burdens on towns that may not be able to afford needed infrastructure projects when forced to comply.

It is time to delist the beetle so that we can put an end to land use restrictions that have and will continue to hinder the ability for states with beetle populations to build roads, water resources, and energy infrastructure. Oklahomans are depending on it.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Valerie Manak on my staff at 202.224.5754.

In God We Trust,


James Lankford
United States Senator