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**INCONSISTENT VALUES BETWEEN THE UTAH WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN AND
THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT**

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Abstract

The guiding values of wildlife management have shifted over time. In the early days of European and American wildlife management, the primary goal was to maximize the populations of animals that hunters found most desirable to hunt. As we began to care about wildlife for ecological and intrinsic reasons, we enacted the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), which protected threatened species and their habitats from destructive human practices. The ESA explicitly states that economic considerations must not factor into a classification decision for a species, codifying into law that wildlife ought to be valued for non-economic reasons. But without any definitive method for preventing the classification of species, Congress introduced State Wildlife Grants to provide states with funding for species in the “greatest need of conservation.”

The Utah Wildlife Action Plan (UWAP) outlines how Utah’s Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) assesses and prioritizes Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCNs). In the UWAP, three factors determine which species they consider SGCNs: the likelihood of an ESA listing, the consequences of such a listing, and their ability to influence a listing. An examination of how the second factor, consequences, is calculated reveals that Species of Primarily Economic Concern (SPECs) can be listed as SGCNs and Species of No Economic Concern (SNECs) will be automatically disqualified from a SGCN classification and, in turn, conservation funding. Embedded within the methods of the UWAP sits this implicit value—that a species without economic concern is of no conservation concern—that stands in direct opposition to the values proposed by the ESA. The implementation of the UWAP also yields contradictions to the ESA. No species embodies Utah’s commitment to ensuring SPECs do not receive an ESA classification more than the greater sage-grouse. The grouse lives in 26 of Utah’s 29 counties and would spell economic peril were they to receive an endangered species classification. To avoid that outcome, Utah committed over \$5 million annually, far more than any other species, towards the conservation of grouse habitat in the state. The UWAP and the UDWR’s implementation of that plan has created a system where conservation resources end up doled out to species based on which species’ classification would have the greatest economic consequences.