

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES DECISIONS



100
YEARS



20
YEARS

IT CAN VARY BY SPECIES GREEN SEA TURTLE VS TRISPOT DARTER

Green sea turtles and many other long-lived species have foreseeable futures of up to 100 years. But trispot darters live only 2-3 years. FWS can't predict past 10 generations for the darter, limiting the foreseeable future to 20 years.

IT CAN VARY BY THREAT CLIMATE CHANGE VS DEVELOPMENT

On average, the projections for climate change extend much farther into the future than those for development. But we rarely understood why based on the explanations in the decisions.

68
YEARS



37
YEARS



46
YEARS

THE OVERALL AVERAGE OF FORESEEABLE FUTURE FROM 2010-2019

Across all 447 ESA decisions that addressed the foreseeable future, the average timeframe was 46 years. And 70% of the timeframes fell within 20 to 70 years.

IT'S NOT ALWAYS QUANTIFIED

BUT QUANTIFICATION HAS INCREASED SINCE 2010

Only 46% of FWS decisions involving the foreseeable future specified the number of years it represents, with recent decisions doing so more often. But among NMFS decisions, 74% quantified this concept and did so using clearer language.



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Quantify the foreseeable future where possible, being clear about what timeframe it covers.
2. Specify the maximum length of the foreseeable future, rather than the minimum length, which is rarely informative.
3. Be consistent about how to determine the foreseeable future for climate change.
4. Describe these and other best practices in an ESA guidance.

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