Mac, Lehman Brothers, and Merrill Lynch all collapsed, and the stock market plummeted. The situation made McCain's repeated claim, "The fundamentals of the economy are strong," seem ridiculous. As Congress discussed a $700 billion bailout bill in late September, McCain temporarily suspended his campaign to fly to Washington to join the talks and threatened to cancel his scheduled debate with Obama. His role in the bailout controversy proved inconsequential, however, and he ended up appearing with Obama in the presidential debate after all. The series of three debates between the candidates did little to change the polls, which showed Obama leading by double digits. The Obama campaign continued to raise record-setting amounts of money, including $150 million in September alone, giving him an additional advantage in the closing days of the campaign.

On November 4, Obama won the presidency by a comfortable margin, and Democrats increased their majorities in both houses of Congress. Obama beat McCain by 53–46 percent in the popular vote and by 365–173 in the Electoral College, winning Ohio and Florida and several states that had been dependably Republican. Obama was helped by the worsening economy, as 63 percent of voters chose it as the main issue, compared to less than 10 percent who identified the Iraq War, terrorism, health care, or energy. Nevertheless, cultural identification still appeared to motivate voting behavior, as Obama won blacks by a 95–4 margin, Latinos by 66–31, those aged 18–29 by 66–32, urban residents by 63–35, and women by 56–43. Religious identification remained a key political determinant, as Obama lost among evangelical Christians by 26–73, while winning Jews by 78–21 and the religiously unaffiliated by 75–23. On a broader scale, however, Obama won every major region of the country by at least 10 points, except for the South, which he lost 54–45. Even there, he carried Virginia and North Carolina. In congressional elections, Democrats raised their majority to 256–178 in the House (with one vacancy) and to 56–41 in the Senate. In addition, two seated independents caucused with the Democrats, and one election was still disputed.

George Rising

See also: Clinton, Hillary; Election of 2000; McCain, John; Obama, Barack; Palin, Sarah.

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Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 is comprehensive federal legislation designed to protect all species in the United States designated as endangered by protecting habitats critical to their survival. Congress passed the ESA with near unanimity in both the House (390–12) and Senate (95–0), and the bill was signed into law by President Richard Nixon on December 28, 1973. The ESA was part of an unprecedented period in U.S. environmental policy characterized by a flurry of major legislation. Of the dozens of laws enacted during this period—including the National Environmental Policy Act (1969), Clean Air Act (1970), and Clean Water Act (1977)—the Endangered Species Act proved to be one of the most controversial. Opponents have claimed that ESA is a tool unjustly used to bar commercial access to public lands and deprive private property owners of their rights. Ironically, the legislation is also controversial among some environmentalists, who claim that ESA is ineffective at protecting species, for several reasons: the length of time necessary to get a species added to the endangered list, inadequate protection of habitats once the species is listed, and perverse incentives for private landowners to destroy endangered species' habitats.

Under ESA, a species may be listed as either *endangered* or *threatened*, for the purpose of assisting in the recovery of its natural population. The ESA defines an endangered species as one "in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range." A threatened species is any deemed "likely to become an endangered species through all or a significant portion of its range." The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) administers the ESA for all terrestrial and freshwater species, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for all marine species. Once a species is listed, the secretary of the USFWS or NMFS must designate critical habitats—the terrestrial or aquatic area necessary for the existence of the species—and develop a suitable recovery plan.

Under the terms of the ESA, the decision to list a species must be based entirely on science; economic factors may not be taken into account. This stipulation has been a major focal point of conflict from the outset. Opponents of the measure have argued that the economic consequences of listing a species as endangered or threatened deserve consideration. Proponents insist that economic concerns should not be taken into account during the listing process—which may determine the survival or extinction of a particular species—but that the development of critical habitat and recovery plans take economic factors into account by allowing the incidental harm of an endangered or threatened species.

Two of the most controversial cases involving the listing of a species and the conflict over economic considerations involved the snail darter in Tennessee and the spotted owl in the Pacific Northwest. In 1973,

ecologist Michael Johnson discovered the snail darter, a small brown-gray fish, upstream of the Tennessee Valley Authority's development project for the Tellico Dam on the Little Tennessee River. The species was quickly listed as endangered, resulting in the issuance of an injunction to halt construction of the nearly complete $160 million dam. The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the injunction to halt construction on the grounds that economic concerns should not be taken into account, but Congress eventually passed an exception in this case to allow completion of the dam. In the end, the snail darter was transplanted to the nearby Hiwassee River (and later, as it turned out, the fish was found existing in other waterways; in 1984 it was downgraded from endangered to threatened). The case of the spotted owl presented a similar controversy. The northern spotted owl is dependent on old-growth forest, which is highly coveted by the timber industry. The owl was listed as a threatened species in 1990, which promptly halted logging of critical habitat in national forestland. Many timber workers were left without work, causing opponents of the ESA to cite this case as an example of the far-reaching—and, for some, devastating—economic implications of the law.

As of the spring 2007, 1,880 species in the United States had been officially listed as threatened or endangered. In the ESA's thirty-four-year history, only twenty-three species had been dropped from the list. With the recovery of species being the paramount goal of the legislation, some environmentalist critics cite this as evidence that the ESA has failed to live up to its purpose. Moreover, some environmentalists fear that the designation of critical habitats leads certain landowners to destroy habitat on private land prior to the listing of a species, so as to avoid government regulation. At the same time, however, only nine listed species have been removed from the endangered species list due to extinction—which proponents of the ESA point to as evidence of legislative success. One success story is that of the bald eagle, which was removed from the endangered species list in 2007 after four decades of protection, growing in number from about 400 to 10,000. Regardless of one's perspective, the Endangered Species Act is likely to remain a contentious issue in U.S. environmental policy as long as it remains in effect.

David N. Cherney

See also: Arnold, Ron; Environmental Movement; Forests, Parklands, and Federal Wilderness; Nixon, Richard; Watt, James.

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English as the Official Language

Since the 1980s, a movement referred to as "official English" by proponents—and "English-only" by critics—has actively pushed for codifying English as the national language of the United States. Neither the U.S. Constitution nor any federal statutes mandate an official language. In 1983, Senator James Inhofe (R-OK) founded the advocacy group U.S. English, Inc., based in Washington, D.C., to lobby for passage of such a measure. Another prominent group in the movement is called ProEnglish, founded in 1994 and based in Arlington, Virginia.

The first attempt to legislate English as the national language began in 1981, when U.S. Senator S.I. Hayakawa (R-CA) introduced a constitutional amendment. "Official English" bills and constitutional amendments have been introduced in every subsequent session of Congress, but none has come close to final enactment. In 1996, the House of Representatives approved such a bill, but it was never voted on by the Senate. Federal reluctance to make English the official language contrasts with sentiment in thirty states and a number of municipalities that have enacted such measures, including Hawaii's designation of both English and Hawaiian as the state's official languages. In 2002, the Superior Court of Alaska struck down that state's English initiative, which had been passed by 68 percent of voters, ruling in favor of Yupik Eskimos, the plaintiffs in the case.

Activists for "official English" emphasize the cause of national unity, asserting that the country could split into diverse linguistic communities without an official national language. In support of their argument, they point to countries such as Belgium and Canada, where language diversity has contributed to civil unrest, independence movements, and other forms of societal instability. Not having an official language, they contend, creates little incentive for immigrants to learn English, making assimilation more difficult. They further argue that an informed citizenry depends on command of the English language.

The cost of disseminating information in other languages is another focus of "official English" proponents. Taxpayers' money is wasted, they argue, if matters of society have to be translated and posted in different languages. While proponents concede that materials should be published in other languages for the promotion of public health, safety, tourism, and foreign language

CULTURE WARS

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ISSUES, VIEWPOINTS, AND VOICES

Volume 1

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