

A Public Hearing for the "Weetzel"

Grades 5-8

Focus on decision making

To receive protection under the Endangered Species Act, a plant or animal must first be placed on the list of *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants*, which is maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. To evaluate whether a plant or animal should be placed on the list, its status in the wild is assessed through biological surveys and reviews. As part of the review process, a public hearing may be requested so that people can learn more about the species and the listing process and ask questions about how this endangered or threatened status may affect them. After the public hearing the biologist addresses all the comments presented at the hearing and develops a final regulation to list the species as endangered or threatened or to withdraw the proposal if he/she decides it is not appropriate. This regulation is then sent to the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and a final decision. This exercise involves a simulated public hearing on the proposal to list a species (the "weetzel") as an endangered species. Students will participate in this simulated public hearing, and the acting biologists decide whether to list the "weetzel" as endangered.

Objectives

To help students be able to
(1) describe the process by which a species is listed as endangered,
(2) describe the characteristics of endangered species, and (3) relate to the conflicts encountered when deciding to list or not list a species as endangered.

Age

Grades 5-8

Time

Approximately 1 hour (can extend to a 2-hour activity).

Correlation

F: Science in Personal and Social Perspectives

Materials

- Books and reference material on endangered species and issues (including related sections from this program, such as those on the values, descriptions, reasons why species become endangered, laws, and success stories)
- Construction paper
- Chalkboard or easel
- Writing, coloring, and drawing materials
- Scissors
- Glue

Preparation

- Review the background information of this guide.
- Make copies of the Public Hearing Comment Form, pg. 144, and Public Hearing Role Play, pg. 145.

Procedure

Explain to the students that they will enact a public hearing to decide whether to write a final regulation to recommend listing the make-believe "weetzel" as an endangered species. Explain that they will be role-playing. They are trying to learn about and understand different points of view. Each group will role-play and comment on the proposed listing of the "weetzel" from that point of view. The groups may also (if time allows) make props, such as microphones, gavels, hats, and other attire, using construction paper and coloring and drawing materials.

As the teacher, you need to help students properly manage the conflict. Remind them that they will be role-playing and trying to learn about and understand different views. They need not judge the other participants as better or worse. It is a learning experience, and they should listen openly. They may discuss differences but need not argue about them. A decision will be made that takes all their interests into account. But it is a balance; no one will get 100 percent of their needs met.

Discuss the public hearing process. A public hearing is an official meeting to gather biological information and to provide information to the public. A lawyer is present as the moderator. Public hearings are used for a variety of issues, including helping to settle a controversy over the listing of a species as endangered or threatened. In this case we will enact a public hearing on the listing of the "weetzel" as endangered. It is assumed that the biologists have proposed the endangered listing. Next there will be a hearing to receive public comments on this recommendation. After the comments are heard the biologists will decide whether to make a final determination on the listing of the "weetzel" as endangered. A statement would then be sent to the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the final decision.

The class now decides what this "weetzel" is, what it looks like, what it eats, and what its habitat is. They must also determine its status in the wild; i.e., numbers, and decide if they are healthy populations, declining in numbers, etc. The students, as a class, use the cumulative knowledge from past exercises to decide this. Refer to sections in this program that address the reasons plants and animals become endangered and descriptions of endangered and threatened plants and animals in Tennessee. They may even make a drawing of the animal and its habitat on paper or on the board.

Divide the class into groups of two to four students. Each group will be a participant in the public hearing enactment. Give each group a copy of the Public Hearing Role Play page at the end of this activity with their role highlighted.

Each group formulates their comments regarding this listing, coming from the perspective of their role. Each group can also use the reference materials on endangered

species supplied by the teacher from this program and other references. The teacher may assist in the formulation of the group comments and the role development.

After they have written their comments, have each group designate a spokesperson. Now begin the Public Hearing following the roles from the Public Hearing Role Play page. The Lawyers, Biologists, and Court Reporters sit in front of the class. The Lawyers begin (and also ensure that the comments proceed in an orderly fashion and that there are no arguments). The Biologists' turns are next. Each group's spokesperson comes to the front of the room, reads their group's comments, and hands the comment form to the Court Reporters. There is no discussion, and no questions are allowed at this time. That comes later with the question-and-answer period. The Court Reporters summarize and record each group's comments. It is now time for the question-and-answer period, moderated by the Lawyers. The Biologists and Court Reporters then go outside the classroom to discuss the situation and make a decision. While they are outside, the other groups may continue their roles and discussions. The Biologists and Court Reporters come back into the room, and the Biologists announce their decision to recommend listing or not listing the "weetzel" as endangered and their reasoning.

****Remember to tell the students that if they decide to list the species as endangered, this would be sent to the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a final decision. If the Director agrees, a recovery plan would then be developed to help the species get to a more healthy population level so it is no longer endangered.**

****Also note that although many other issues, not simply biological information, are discussed at the**

hearing, the decision to recommend the listing of the species as endangered is supposed to be based solely on the biological information. That is what the law states. These other issues come up at real public hearings, and it is worthwhile for the students to hear and discuss them so they can better understand the various concerns and conflicts surrounding the process.

At the end of the hearing, hold a debriefing period for the students. Discuss such issues as their feelings in their roles, their opinion about the decisions, the idea of role-playing, etc.

Evaluation

Evaluate students by observing their preparation and presentation using the objectives for this activity.

A Public Hearing Comments

(for the "Weetzel" Public Hearing)

Names:

Name of Group You Represent:

Comments:

Public Hearing Role Play

The Lawyers

sit in front of the classroom and manage the meeting. This begins as they introduce themselves, the Biologists, and the Court Reporters. The Lawyers explain that the purpose of the Public Hearing is to provide a time for public comment on the proposed listing of the “weetzel” as endangered. Lawyers are familiar with the laws and are prepared to answer questions regarding these laws during the Public Hearing.

The Court Reporters

sit in front of the classroom and summarize and record the comments of the Public Hearing. They record the name of the commentor, the group he/she represents, and a summary of the comments. Court reporters should familiarize themselves with the laws and the information on the “weetzel” from the work at the beginning of this activity.

The Biologists

sit in front of the classroom; they are the experts on the “weetzel” and have proposed that it be listed as endangered. They are now receiving comments on this proposal at the Public Hearing. They provide information on the “weetzel”—where it lives, what it eats, how many there are, and why it was proposed as endangered (all the information the class decided on the “weetzel” at the beginning of this activity). They are familiar with the Endangered Species Act.

The Mayor

is concerned with the interests of the people of the town and wants to ensure that the townspeople are happy with the proposed decision to list the “weetzel” as endangered. The mayor has the following concerns: “Will the town lose money? Will people lose their land or the use of their land? Is the environment healthy for people and animals in the town? Is this listing necessary?” Review the information on the

“weetzel” from the work at the beginning of this activity. Think of other concerns you might have if you were Mayor.

The Farmer

works with the land and wants it to be healthy. The farmer wonders: “Is this animal endangered? Is the land unhealthy? If this animal is listed, will it limit the use of my land?” Review the information on the “weetzel” from the work at the beginning of this activity. Think of other concerns you might have if you were a Farmer.

A Scientist from the local university

is concerned with the studies on the “weetzel.” Were the studies complete? What was studied? Is this listing necessary? Does it affect other creatures in the environment? Review the information on the “weetzel” from your work at the beginning of this activity. Think of other concerns you might have if you were a Scientist.

A Development Company

(your group can decide what the company builds) is concerned that the listing of the “weetzel” as endangered will put an end to construction around town. The company representatives wonder - will the company lose money? Is the listing necessary? Is the environment becoming unhealthy? Review the information on the “weetzel” from the work at the beginning of this activity. Think of other concerns you might have if you owned a Development Company.

A Local Family

living in the town likes to hike in the woods nearby. They are concerned for the health of their family and their environment. Does this mean there is a problem with their local environment? Will this limit their use of the local areas? Think of other concerns you might have if your family lived in the town.

A Local Nature Club Member

enjoys hiking and watching birds in the local nature parks. The members of the club are very supportive of protecting endangered plants and animals. They realize that when one animal and its environment is protected, so are many other plants and animals that live there. They enjoy exploring and protecting special local places. Think of other concerns you might have if you were a Nature Club Member.

