

The Need to Fail in Order to Succeed

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Yesterday I was reflecting on the affects that the Endangered Species Act has had on our bureaucratic methods of wildlife management and, naturally, my thoughts turned to politicians. No, that's not the joke. This is a serious article. In my experience, which is significant, one of the problems with the management of endangered species is that grant money and preservation programs can be reduced should the efforts be successful and the species is de-listed. I know from personal experience that this is a fear born by managers.

And so now consider the politician. The successful politician has campaigned on a signature issue and been elected and reelected because of that person's willingness to work on that particular issue. Years might be pent passing bills, debating, fighting, making grand oratory before a nearly empty senate chamber, and establishing oneself as the champion of the matter. If, in fact, the issue is resolved, the politician must start all over with a new issue. Just as the managing biologist must find a new species to save, each is faced with reestablishing themselves as an expert in that particular field, and it is highly likely that other experts in the field already exist.

In the political world, 'succeeding' is defined by the results of the next election. Providing permanent and effective legislation to address a problem raised by constituents puts that success in jeopardy.