



FORESTS FOREVER

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Pombo tears up the Endangered Species Act *California congressman attacks protections for wildlife*

Rep. Richard Pombo is trying to make it easier for species to become extinct.

Pombo (R-Tracy) introduced H.R. 3824, his rewrite of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on Sept. 19. Forests Forever is strongly opposed to the measure.

The bill moved quickly through the House Resources Committee— which Pombo heads— and passed the floor of the House on Sept. 29 by a 229 to 193 vote. The bill moves now to the Senate, where it is expected to meet with opposition.

With a title couched in the now-familiar doublespeak of Republican environmental bills, Pombo's Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2005 would in fact put threatened and endangered species in jeopardy and make species recovery almost impossible.

The ESA was enacted in 1973. It provides for the protection of wild animals, fish and plants faced with extinction, requiring that diminished populations be restored and habitat essential to a species be preserved. It has helped bring back the bald eagle, grizzly bear, gray wolf, and many other beloved and ecologically valuable plants and animals.

Pombo has been a long-standing and determined foe of the ESA. His bill would fatally weaken recovery efforts. Crucially, the bill would eliminate consideration of critical habitat, and make any habitat preservation non-binding.

“Wild lands and wildlife go together,” Forests Forever executive director Paul Hughes said. “Without protection of critical habitat, it will be impossible for some endangered species to recover.”

Forest advocates have relied on the ESA as one of their most effective tools. To save listed species such as the old-growth-forest-dependent marbled murrelet or the northern spotted owl, their forest habitat must be preserved as well.

Pombo's bill strips out the ESA's requirement that recovery plans be developed for “conservation and survival of endangered species and threatened species.” By stacking its proposed “recovery teams” with industry representatives, the bill would exalt economic considerations above science.

Further, the bill takes the power to define “the best science” away from the scientific community and places it into the hands of the Secretary of Interior, a political appointee.

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Restore, Reinhabit, Re-Enchant

Under Pombo's bill, federal agencies would have only 90 days to object to development projects that might harm endangered or threatened species. If no objections are filed in that period, according to the proposed legislation, projects may proceed without review.

Federal agencies charged with enforcing the act would also be hit hard financially by a "takings" clause that would require the agencies to reimburse landowners for obeying the law.

The bill is favored by real-estate developers, extreme property-rights groups, and extractive industries like oil and timber, all of which can realize greater profits if they no longer have to take endangered plants and animals into account.

Forests Forever is a nonprofit group in San Francisco dedicated to the protection of California's forests.