



FORESTS FOREVER

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Pombo/Gibbons public-lands giveaway defeated

Public outcry forces withdrawal of 1872 Mining Law revisions

Reps. Richard Pombo (R-CA) and Jim Gibbons (R-Nev.) yesterday withdrew their controversial mining law provisions from the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, the House version of the bill authorizing the federal budget for the next year.

The proposed revisions of the 1872 Mining Law would have privatized millions of acres of public lands and allowed mining and real estate development within national forests and parks.

“Forests Forever applauds the hard work of thousands of concerned citizens whose letters and phone calls alerted their political representatives to the importance of this underhanded attempt to sell off large tracts of public land,” said Paul Hughes, Forests Forever’s executive director. “Issues as critical and far-reaching as this should be debated in the open, not hidden in unrelated appropriations measures.”

Resistance to the changes was broad-based, ranging from U.S. senators, state governors, and academics to fishermen, hunters, and environmentalists.

Under the provisions of the 1872 Mining Law, a claim— the right to mine minerals on public land— can also be “patented,” that is, bought outright from the federal government for, at most, \$5 an acre.

Pombo and Gibbon’s rewrite would have ended a 1994 moratorium on such sales and allowed public lands to be patented for \$1000 an acre, or market value,

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whether or not the land contained valuable minerals. Public lands could have been claimed for mineral rights, patented, then developed with hotels, condos or ski resorts.

“Forests Forever was one voice among many urging senators to strip out the mining law provisions inserted by Pombo and Gibbons,” Hughes said. “We can expect more attempts from mining interests and real estate developers to steal our public parks and forests for private profit. But when proposals like these are exposed to the light of day, public opinion will always be against them.”