



## Endangered protections

*House bill would emasculate the Endangered Species Act*

September 28, 2005

Florida has 111 species of animals and plants that are protected by the Endangered Species Act, which faces a serious threat this week on Capitol Hill.

House Republicans are attempting to fast-track legislation that would weaken a law that has helped protect more than 1,250 species since it was adopted in 1973.

Among the success stories is the resurgence of the American bald eagle, our majestic national symbol, which can now be seen soaring above the Manatee, Myakka and Peace rivers.

The Florida panther, the green sea turtle, the manatee and the scrub jay are among the many species in this state that still need the act's protections.

Florida's congressional delegation must oppose the attempt by Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Calif., to "modernize" the Endangered Species Act. A bill that Pombo pushed through the House Resources Committee, which he chairs, would emasculate the act -- not improve it. The full House could vote on the bill this week.

Pombo's bill would strengthen the rights of private property owners and reduce the power of the federal government to protect threatened species.

The bill would allow property owners to request a ruling on their plans within 180 days; a failure by the overworked and underfunded Interior Department to respond in time "would act as a green light," reported Cory Reiss of the Washington bureau.

Another provision calls for full compensation of property owners for the value of unbuilt projects blocked by the act.

The Endangered Species Act is far from perfect. Only 23 of the species it protects are increasing in population, and nine protected species have become extinct.

But Pombo's bill does too little to improve the protection of threatened plants and creatures, and too much to enable the destruction of their vital habitat.