

Pombo appears on TV comedy where species act is the joke

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No, he didn't pull a spotted owl out of a hat.

But Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Tracy, did make his entertainment debut on an episode of the topical Showtime comedy series, "Penn & Teller: Bullshit." The episode, "Endangered Species," first ran Tuesday and is scheduled to repeat at 10 p.m. tonight.

Pombo was one of six guests who addressed the Endangered Species Act. The congressman has earned attention — and criticism from Democrats — from publicity about his plans for changing change the Endangered Species Act in recent months.

Penn & Teller is a two-man magic act. Penn is the big one with the ponytail who does all the talking, and Teller is the little guy with curly hair and the impish smile.

One of the pair's trademarks is telling the audience how they do their tricks — and occasionally exposing other magicians along the way. "Bullshit" tries to take this same approach to the real world.

"The magicians take a hard look at the fight to save endangered

species, an expensive and fruitless exercise to preserve critters that may already be on the road to extinction through natural selection," says a promotion for the show on the "Bullshit" Web site.

"I imagined they were probably going to take a lot of potshots at the Endangered Species Act," said Bill Snape, chairman of the board of the Endangered Species Coalition, a Washington, D.C.,-based advocacy group. "But this is more inflammatory than I could have guessed."

Snape that he has yet to see the episode, but he said a description of it seemed to repeat the contention that the Endangered Species Act has done little or nothing to save species.

Environmentalists counter that by pointing out that 99 percent of the species listed under the Act are still around.

The show's Web site goes on to state that "human beings and industrialization are not the sole impetus for extinction."

Snape said that neither his organization nor any other he knows of has ever claimed this was the case.

Another organization featured on the show appeared far happier with the result.

"I love it," said Jody Clarke, vice president of communications of the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

"It's funny. It's definitely an ideological program."

That ideology, Clarke notes, could not be called conservative. Instead, she said, its libertarian — just like her organization. Clarke said that her Institute speaks to business and regulatory issues, but takes no position on social issues like gay marriage.

She noted that the show also skewers the political right on some of its favorite social issues. It has done episodes critical of family values, the drug war and creationism. One episode questioned whether there was any truth behind the Bible.

"There's a lot of bad language," Clarke said. "It's definitely not conservative."

The group sent their adjunct environmental scholar R.J. Smith to the show. Clarke said that representatives from her group have appeared on the show three or four times during its three seasons.

Smith, she said, has generally been supportive of Pombo's efforts. However, she noted that Smith said some portions of Pombo's reform bill on the act would give big business advantages over small landowners.

Pombo's staff at the House Resources Committee did not return calls for comment.