



Thursday, September 1, 2005

## Pombo expects approval of species act revision

STOCKTON — U.S. Rep. Richard Pombo, the Tracy Republican who chairs the House Resources Committee, said Wednesday that he expects the House to pass his far-reaching rewrite of the Endangered Species Act as soon as next month.

Pombo said he and key Democrats agree on about 90 percent of the language in the bill, which will likely be sponsored by a Democrat.

Pombo made the comments during a meeting Wednesday with Record editors.

The bill would change how the federal government designates “critical habitat” of rare plants and animals. Under the Pombo proposal, a federal agency first would have to come up with a plan to pull the rare species back from extinction. That plan would then declare where the critical habitat is located.

Currently, habitat is designated before biologists come up with a recovery plan, a system that Pombo and other critics have said doesn’t make sense.

Pombo’s proposal also would reimburse private landowners for any restrictions that may be placed on their land after it is designated

as critical habitat. Under the present system, landowners are usually asked to voluntarily comply with effort to protect species on their land.

The committee chairman also said he hopes to hold hearings later this autumn over the recent crash of some Delta fish populations.

Biologists so far don’t agree on what has caused the rapid decline of Delta smelt, shad and striped bass.

Pombo said he hopes to have those congressional hearings in the Delta area instead of Washington.

Pombo also questioned the success of CALFED, the joint state-federal program that aimed to restore the Delta’s ecosystem while ensuring reliable water exports from the Delta. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on environmental restoration, so Pombo asked why would the fish be in trouble?

“Even the biologists can’t figure it out. I’d like to know where all the money went,” he said.

“It makes sense. That’s the goal of the law — to recover species,” he said.