

Howdy partner

By Bob Brownne

Former Congressman Richard Pombo's new job with an Oregon lobbying firm puts him on familiar turf.

Recently, Pac/West Communications of Wilsonville, Ore., announced that Pombo had joined the company as a senior partner. The company describes itself as a media relations, lobbying, political consulting, grassroots outreach and social marketing services company.

Pombo said this week that he received many job offers after he lost his 11th District Congressional seat to Democrat Jerry McNerney of Pleasanton. He chose Pac/West because the company is based on the West Coast, including an office in Sacramento, and works on the same issues he was interested in before and during his 14 years in Congress.

"I told people that I wanted to stay and work on issues I care about, and this gives me a chance to do that," he said. "I'm having fun doing it, and it gives me a chance to work with the groups and people I've worked with before."

Pombo declined to say how much he will earn as a Pac/West senior partner, but noted that he has a share of the company's equity. Pombo said he will work for the company full time, with his time split between Washington, D.C., and the West Coast.

Pombo said he became familiar with Pac/West as it lobbied for legislation that came before the House Resources Committee, for which Pombo served as chairman.

Laws the company were interested in included Pombo's 2005 effort to rewrite parts of the Endangered Species Act. That law proposed a stricter scientific review before plants and animals could be listed as threatened or endangered, and it also limited the government's ability to set aside "critical habitat" for the benefit of endangered species.

Pombo said that Congressional rules prohibit him from becoming a lobbyist within the first year after leaving Congress, but he said he could take on that role in the future. In the meantime, he will advise groups that represent fishermen, hunters, farmers and ranchers on how to work with legislators.

"We will work out a strategy on how to get it done. A lot of it is working with broad-based groups," he said. "I can help them become more effective at influencing state and federal policy."

Steve Ding, Pombo's former chief of staff, also started working for Pac/West in early February as the company's vice president for California.

Environmental groups that campaigned against Pombo's run for re-election last year aren't surprised at his new job.

"Pombo has more or less been working for Pac/West and their timber cronies since he got into office," said Kieran Suckling, policy director for the Center for Biological Diversity.

He added that Pac/West works in opposition to environmental groups, which refer to the "grassroots" groups the company represents as "Astroturf" groups.

"They set up a public relations program to make it appear there are grassroots groups supporting logging when it's actually a wealthy timber lobbying group," Suckling said.

Pac/West's Executive Vice President Tim Wigley, formerly with Georgia-Pacific Corporation and the Oregon Forest Industries Council, led the Save Our Species Alliance, which campaigned on behalf of Pombo's Endangered Species Act bill.

He also led a 13-state coalition to pass the Healthy Forests Initiative of 2003, seen by proponents as an effort to reduce the threat of wildfires and by critics as a concession to the timber industry.

Last year, the state of Alaska agreed to spend \$3 million with Pac/West to lobby legislators to support oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

