



Protect animals from pesticides

A Times Editorial

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Forty years ago, the only place you were sure to see an American bald eagle was on the back of a dollar bill. Because of widespread use of DDT, bald eagles had been nearly wiped out, with only 417 nesting pairs surviving in the continental United States (excluding Alaska). So it's downright unpatriotic that the U.S. House wants to weaken the law that protects animals from pesticides.

Yet that is what House members did when they passed a bill that would essentially destroy the Endangered Species Act. There are a number of bad revisions in the bill, including one that would require taxpayers to reward landowners who aren't able to fully develop a piece of property under the act. That requirement alone would probably stop the government from choosing protection over development.

Another section of the bill removes any pesticide restrictions from consideration under the act. In fact, no one could be held responsible if otherwise legal use of pesticides harmed a threatened or endangered species.

If that bill were the law of the land in the 1960s, the bald eagle may not have recovered. Even under current enforcement, 67-million birds die of pesticide poisoning each year. Congress should be offering endangered species more protection from pesticides, not less.

When it returns to work, the Senate needs to bring sanity to the debate and reject the House bill. Otherwise, the bald eagle portrayed in the Great Seal of the United States of America might as well be replaced with a chicken.