

Stalking endangered species

Editorial

ONE of the disturbing elements of the ideology shared by a majority of politicians in Washington, D.C., and Columbus these days is an unrelenting hostility toward decades-old environmental and conservation laws.

This animosity usually is couched in support for unrestrained economic development and related "pro-jobs" policies. And it's often disguised with disingenuous terms, as when the meaning of "clear skies" is perverted to allow more air pollution or when "healthy forests" really involves cutting down more trees on public property.

So it is with the cynically named "Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2005," pushed in Congress by Republican Rep. Richard Pombo, a California rancher who is chairman of the House Resources Committee.

The bill would repeal the federal Endangered Species Act, which has been used to preserve and protect nearly 1,400 types of wildlife - mammals, birds, insects, reptiles, amphibians, fish, clams, and snails - that have been threatened with extinction since the law's adoption in 1973.

This is such an extreme piece of legislation that it is hard to see how Mr.

Pombo could expect support from a majority of lawmakers to gut what has been a popular law. But there is no doubt about the congressman's intentions. His solid anti-conservation record in Congress has earned him the sobriquet of "eco-thug" from the Sierra Club.

For many Americans, federal laws to protect endangered species amount to a distant mandate from Washington. Often the only thing they hear are hyped complaints from developers and industry that creatures such as the Snail Darter or the Northern Spotted Owl are in the way of a subdivision full of houses or a logging tract.

Fortunately, northwest Ohioans have right in front of them a perfect example of an endangered species that has reappeared in the wild after development nearly destroyed its habitat.

The Karner blue butterfly is again multiplying in the Oak Openings region of western Lucas County, thanks to a seven-year project at the Nature Conservancy's Kitty Todd Preserve.

The fragile Karner blue was designated as an endangered species in 1992. This summer, dozens of the rare butterflies, raised at the Toledo Zoo, are to be released at a second area in the preserve. The process is to be repeated over several years.

If Richard Pombo has his way, urban sprawl will be allowed to triumph over nature even more than it does now and such worthy conservation efforts could be a thing of the past.

The American landscape has plenty of room for development and endangered species to co-exist without one unduly hindering the other. But this can only continue if the Endangered Species Act is kept intact. Congress should reject the Pombo bill.