



This 'reform' is endangering

Editorial
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Proponents of "reforming" the Endangered Species Act claim they are acting in the interests of saving more wildlife, but the new rules added to the 1973 act would only lighten environmental standards and line the pockets of special interests.

The changes proposed by Republican Representative Richard Pombo, a California rancher, that are housed in the Threatened and Endangered Species and Recovery Act of 2005 would allow private land owners to demand payment for complying with environmental laws. The reform bill passed the House Thursday.

Not only is it absurd to pay individuals for complying with the law, but as the new rules are written the compensation available to land owners is arbitrary. Owners of sensitive wildlife habitats must now refrain from developing their land in a manner that would jeopardize a species protected by law. If the reforms pass the Senate as they did the House, then land owners would be paid for their "losses." But the law would leave it up to land owners to determine how much losses they are suffering. Land owners could declare they had planned what would have been a very profitable venture, and then demand the government pay them for hypothetical future gains.

The reforms anticipate the huge handouts of taxpayer money by calling for an increase in the budget for endangered species. The new measures would cost taxpayers \$600 million a year; that's up from \$358 million in 2005 and \$379 million in 2006. Advocates of the "reform" bill argue the money is going to better the government's record of saving wildlife, but if they were truly interested in saving animals then their ideas are counterproductive.

How do the bill's defenders propose to save animals by repealing rules that protect endangered species from pesticides, as their new bill does? Or how will threatened wildlife fare better by eliminating habitat protections, as their new rules allow? The new rules eliminate critical habitat designations that have served to protect migratory patterns of birds, such as the whooping crane. Eliminating regulations on pesticides would once again threaten the bald eagle that is only now making a comeback from near-extinction and being seen again in Massachusetts.

The House voted 229-193 in favor of the Endangered Species reform bill, a vote mainly along party lines with 34 Republicans joining Democrats in opposition, and 36 Democrats joining Republicans in the majority. Representative Joe Baca, a California Democrat who co-sponsored the bill, stood at the podium while speaking on the House floor swatting around as if trying to catch a fly. He claimed that under the old rules he wouldn't be allowed to kill that fly. If that indicates the level of thought representatives put into enacting the reform bill then more species will face extinction. We hope the Senate, which includes some environmentally conscious New England Republicans, will reject this farcical legislation.