

# THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

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## 'Wildlife Extinction Act' would gut species law

By DAVID HOGAN  
*Op-Ed*

The Endangered Species Act is in the crosshairs of congressional extremists seeking to weaken it, then eliminate it. The act is under attack even while it successfully protects wildlife pushed to the polluted, urbanized edge of extinction.

America should be proud of the Endangered Species Act. It's a hallmark of progressive economic development and it's helped us fare far better than other nations in what scientists say is a worldwide extinction crisis.

But while 86 percent of the nation supports the Endangered Species Act, politicians are designing a crippling new bill to empower developers, timber and oil companies, mining corporations and other special interests.

Dubbed the "Wildlife Extinction Bill" by conservationists, its drafters named it the "Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2005." It was spearheaded by longtime Endangered Species Act critic Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Calif., which has raised eyebrows.

Pombo is an unlikely candidate to "improve" the Endangered Species Act to benefit the environment: His 2004 environmental voting record is 0.0 percent, according to the League of Con-

servation Voters.

Pombo's true intent seems to be to loosen environmental regulations for natural resource-extraction corporations and pave political roads for developers.

The Wildlife Extinction Bill hacks huge holes in the safety net of the Endangered Species Act, eliminating critical habitat and placing imperiled species at greater risk. It even changes the definition of "endangered" to one that would disqualify most currently listed species.

The current law is overwhelmingly successful, given that 99 percent of the species listed are still on the planet. And the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that more than two-thirds of currently listed species are improving or stabilized.

Detractors claim the act has bankrupted federal agencies through litigation. The truth is that Bush's Fish and Wildlife Service has refused to list a single species except by court order or threat of lawsuit.

We have too much at stake, particularly here in California. We have the second largest state list for endangered and threatened species -- 303, second only to Hawaii.

Protecting endangered species means

protecting people. Protecting streams for Arroyo toads and Santa Ana sucker fish in Riverside County means less polluted runoff to our water reservoirs and beaches. Leaving undisturbed habitat for Coachella fringe-toed lizards and San Bernardino kangaroo rats means less air pollution from desert bulldozing.

An entire American wildlife panorama -- bald eagles, California condors, sea otters, Arroyo toads and Coachella lizards -- hangs in the balance.

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