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‘Extinction Rider’ Would Unravel Years of Work Protecting Rare Species



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Reckless politicking is threatening years of hard work to push hundreds of imperiled plants and animals around the country closer to Endangered Species Act protection.

A rider on the U.S. House of Representatives’ spending bill for the Interior Department would cut all funding for new protections for species on the brink of extinction. A vote is expected in the coming days.

The “extinction rider” would be a massive blow to a new landmark agreement that would propel 757 species toward protection under the Endangered Species Act. They include some of the country’s rarest and least protected species, like the American wolverine, whose ranks have dwindled to fewer than 500 in the lower 48 states, and the Pacific walrus, which is rapidly losing the sea ice it needs to survive.

The deal signed July 12 between the Center for Biological Diversity and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been more than a decade in the making and finally sets out a series of legally binding deadlines between now and 2018 for the government to make protection decisions on species in all 50 states.

Some of these species, like the white fringeless orchid and the eastern massasauga rattlesnake, have been waiting decades for protection. Others proved unable to outlast the delay: At least two dozen species have gone extinct on the waiting list.

Enter Congress, with a mind to throw away that historic progress and protection. This isn’t about saving money -- the savings would be a laughably small

fraction of the overall budget -- but about pleasing big industries that value profits over wildlife.

And it isn’t just the Endangered Species Act that’s under fire in the House. The Interior appropriations bill is larded with earmarks that would wreak havoc on clean air, clean water and our environment. It includes provisions to kill a proposed ban on new uranium mining on 1 million acres near the Grand Canyon, exempt polluters from greenhouse gas pollution limits and speed up dangerous offshore drilling in the Arctic.

These hostile, shortsighted provisions aren’t some political abstraction; they will have tangible, devastating impacts on imperiled wildlife and the environment for years to come.

Not only would the Fish and Wildlife Service be blocked from protecting any new species, the agency would be stripped of any money to protect the critical habitat that endangered species need to survive.

In a perverse twist, the bill makes no prohibition for taking away Endangered Species Act protection. In fact, while the rider eliminates funds for new protections, it continues to pay for delisting or downgrading species’ protection.

The Obama administration struck an encouraging note recently by voicing its opposition to many of these anti-environment riders. We still have a long way to go, though, and it’s vital that you tell your congressional representative to make sure the riders don’t make it through.

Over the past four decades, the Endangered Species Act has kept extinction at bay for grizzly bears, bald eagles and wolves. We shouldn’t deny that opportunity to hundreds more species that desperately need help but have yet to get any.