



ENDANGERED SPECIES:

Enviro group poll shows broad support for strengthening ESA

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Nearly two-thirds of Americans think Congress should strengthen the Endangered Species Act or leave it alone, according to a new poll conducted by an environmental group.

The Center for Biological Diversity, which frequently sues the government to press for more stringent protections of endangered species, released the results today of the national poll of 657 registered voters. The group found that 42 percent of respondents said Congress should “strengthen” the Endangered Species Act, 25 percent said lawmakers should not make any changes and 24 percent said it should be “weakened.”

The group Public Policy Polling conducted the random telephone survey in late February. It had a margin of error of 3.85 points.

The poll comes as some lawmakers push for changes to the law. Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) introduced legislation last week that would block environmental groups from signing “closed door” endangered species settlements that he says harm businesses and property owners (E&E Daily, Feb. 28). And House Natural Resources Chairman Doc Hastings (R-Wash.) has held a series of hearings to examine the act and clashed with the center over how much the group collects in legal fees (E&ENews PM, June 28, 2012).

The center plans to use the poll results to push back against any attempts to overhaul the act -- by Congress or the White House. Obama administration officials have said they would like to improve the administration of the act.

“The American public absolutely does not want Congress weakening the act; the poll results could not be more clear,” said Bill Snape, an attorney with

the group. “Instead of trying to score cheap political points, Congress ought to be looking at ways to make the implementation of the act better.”

A spokesman for Hastings questioned whether poll respondents answered as they would have if the questions had been presented in a different way.

“The Center for Biological Diversity should ask those same people if millions of taxpayer dollars should be used to pay lawyers to petition the government for an endangered species program with a 1 percent success rate instead of conducting biased push polls to generate answers they want to hear,” said Spencer Pederson, press secretary for the House Natural Resources Committee.

Half of respondents to the poll agreed the country “is doing too little to protect wildlife and too many species are being threatened with extinction.” Thirty-three percent said the United States is “doing too much to protect wildlife from extinction and is harming our economy.” And 27 percent were unsure.

When asked whether they would support a move by the Obama administration to allow portions of critical habitat to be logged, paved or developed, 45 percent of respondents disapproved, 28 percent approved and 27 percent were not sure.

The group conducted the ESA survey as part of a larger poll on voters’ thoughts on human population growth, wildlife and ecosystems. Two-thirds of respondents said that they believe human population growth is driving animals to extinction and that society has a “moral responsibility to address the problem.”

The center is one of the only environmental groups that has targeted the thorny issue of population growth as part of its campaign to save wildlife species from extinction.