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SPECIAL SECTION

CONGRESS SPEAKS

Resources

Energy and clean air are not in opposition
By Rep. Richard Pombo (R-Calif.)

Former President Ronald Reagan said that preservation of our environment is neither a liberal nor conservative challenge, it's plain common sense. Although he may not have been heralded by the environmental community, Reagan's statement leaves little to be said. As such, and in this very spirit, the House Committee on Resources will continue its work in the 108th Congress to ensure that we improve our environmental and resources management policies.

In fact, in the first six months of this Congress, the Resources Committee has already passed major legislation, subsequently passed by the full House, critical to protecting and enhancing the environment.

The bipartisan Healthy Forests Restoration Act, for example, addressed the current forest health crisis and its devastating environmental impacts. A result of well-intentioned but failed management policy, our forests have become unnaturally dense, diseased and cluttered with underbrush that fuels catastrophic wildfires.

These infernos decimate endangered species and their habitats, contaminate drinking water, pollute the air we breathe and threaten human life. The 2002 wildfire season, the worst in recent history, underscored these facts in frightening



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Pombo: Standards and science can ensure America's ability to produce energy with environmental benefits.

fashion.

Proven science and common sense thus dictated a call to action. The Resources Committee answered that call with a comprehensive forest management bill that will save the environment from catastrophic fires and preserve our national forest treasures for future generations. The House passed the measure in an overwhelming display of bipartisanship.

Indeed, we must think of future generations in our decision-making and recognize that we live in a global environment. Like other policy arenas, the United States is the leader on the environment; we have the strongest environmental safeguards in the world. Our standards, science, American ingenuity and 21st century technology have proven that we can produce energy here at home with actual environmental benefits. Yet, increasingly, we are relying on foreign countries and lesser environmental standards for our energy. Common sense, national and economic security and the global environment dictate that we reverse this dangerous trend.

Realizing that environmental stewardship and energy production are not mutually exclusive endeavors, the Resources Committee contributed additional balance to the national energy plan passed the House. We focused on renewable and geothermal sources of energy, including attention to insular areas, Indians, and their unique needs. We also streamlined regulations to encourage more production on non-park federal lands that hold vast supplies of energy, especially clean natural gas. And, as the Clinton administration reported in 1999, our new technologies in energy production allow us to work in these areas with actual environmental benefits, including site restoration techniques that leave the land in original "or better" condition. This entire report is on the Resources Committee website at <http://resourcescommittee.house.gov>.

Looking to the future, this committee will continue to focus on science, accountability and real results in natural resources management. In this light, for example, we will begin to address the failures of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

While well intentioned, the ESA has become a broken law. With over 1,300 listed as threatened or endangered, the ESA has not recovered a single species since its inception in 1973. It has cost taxpayers billions. We must demand results. We can certainly do better.

The ESA is a victim of the law of unintended consequences. Ambiguous language and arbitrary regulations have manifested into thousands of politically motivated lawsuits filed by radical environmental organizations. As the ESA's 0 percent success rate illustrates, these manipulative lawsuits do nothing to help recover an endangered species. On the contrary, they divert (and deplete) valuable agency resources away from scientific study, away from the field and the species and into the courthouse.

Reforms that reflect common sense, embrace results-driven policies, and are underpinned by science will improve the effectiveness of the ESA. Legislatively, we must fix this law

to focus on science and demand results for species recovery. This committee will work towards that end aggressively, despite the fact that, as former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt once put it, “environmentalists resist any change.”

As we know, “on this matter, they are overreacting,” he said.

Science and technology have delivered great successes for the environment and natural resources. But Congress must foster more improvement. As such, be it on ESA, energy security, forest health, marine mammal protection or water storage and delivery for the West, the Committee on Resources will use sound science and the best available technology to improve our environmental and natural resources policies. Continuing the regulatory and legislative status quo, and ignoring advancements in science and technology, just wouldn’t make any sense.