

## **EXPANDING FOSSIL FUEL DEVELOPMENT AND OVERRIDING BEDROCK LAWS**

Passed: 225-204

### **SUMMARY:**

The House passed a bill to mandate expanded fossil fuel development and override laws including the National Environmental Policy Act, threatening important habitats, the critically imperiled Rice's whale, and many additional endangered species as well impacted communities. (*March 30, 2023, Roll Call No. 182*)

### **BACKGROUND:**

As a leading cause of our worsening climate crisis, fossil fuels pose one of the greatest threats to our nation's wildlife. Fossil fuel extraction creates a hostile environment for wildlife – not only degrading and warming the Earth over time, but also causing direct impacts that affect threatened and endangered species immediately, like noise disturbance, pollution, and destruction of habitat.

Our large, intact public lands and bedrock environmental laws work together to shield species from the brunt of fossil fuel industry harm and give them a fighting chance against extinction. The critically endangered Rice's whale, for example, has less than 50 individuals remaining, and needs strong federal protections and pristine public lands now more than ever if it is to survive this decade. Laws like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) ensure that polluters minimize their impact on wildlife and local communities by preventing drilling in sensitive areas and ensuring that proper safeguards against dangers like toxic waste are in place when drilling does occur.

On March 14, 2023, Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.) introduced the "Lower Energy Costs Act", H.R. 1, to gut these protections for wildlife and people in favor of increased fossil fuel production and energy. The legislation would require at least two lease sales every year in both the Gulf of Mexico – the last stronghold for Rice's whale – and Alaska's outer continental shelves while curtailing NEPA reviews and public input before drilling. If passed, the legislation would allow polluters to have unfettered access to public lands with little to no accountability for their environmental harm. At the same time, the legislation would completely exempt all seismic blasting from the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which would harm the countless whales, dolphins, sea turtles, and fish in the surrounding area. For species like Rice's whale, this legislation would dramatically escalate the risk of extinction. Other provisions of the legislation dole out further fossil fuel handouts that threaten our imperiled species, lands, and public health, like repealing programs that regulate mining waste for public safety and reducing the rights of citizens to challenge fossil fuel projects in court.

**OUTCOME:** On March 30, 2023, the House passed H.R. 1, 225-204. "Nay" was the pro-conservation vote. The Senate has not yet voted on the bill.