

WEAKENING ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW OF FEDERAL PROJECTS

Passed: 221-196

SUMMARY:

The House passed a bill that would weaken and circumvent environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act by cutting science, community input, and judicial review out of the process for a wide range of projects. (*December 18, 2025, Roll Call No. 356*).

BACKGROUND:

Federal agencies examine the environmental impacts of proposed projects under the National Environmental Policy Act. This law, which ensures that the government looks before it leaps, is pivotal to government transparency by informing the public about an agency action, and to government accountability by ensuring that the decision-making process is informed by feedback from the community and from scientific experts. Some project proponents mistakenly blame NEPA for delaying projects, despite evidence that NEPA is not a major cause of delay in project development.

Currently, projects that undergo environmental review are evaluated by agency experts, who consider impacts including input from members of the community and the best available science. This feedback is used to inform decisions that are intended to be made for the public interest. Disregarding the NEPA process and ignoring this information would devastate hundreds of millions of acres of public lands critical for wildlife survival. While the permitting process could be modernized and fully staffed to make it more efficient, recklessly rubberstamping projects and shutting science and the public out of the decision-making process will devastate wildlife.

Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.) introduced the SPEED Act, H.R. 4776. H.R. 4776 would drastically limit what projects must undergo the environmental review process, restrict information considered during the NEPA process, and eliminate government accountability by blocking judicial review when a project is challenged in court. The legislation would allow many projects with environmental impacts to completely circumvent the review process. It also allows federal agencies to ignore scientific research that becomes available during a review, and requires agencies to meet the goals of a project sponsor, instead of the public interest. Finally, the bill stacks the deck for project sponsors in court by: weakening the standard of review; allowing agency actions declared unlawful by a court to remain in effect; rejecting claims from members of the community that did not submit a “unique” comment at the right stage of the process; and barring claims that are not filed within 150 days after the final agency action. In all, these changes would reduce the quantity and quality of environmental reviews and the judicial oversight of this process, leading to long-term destruction of our nation’s cherished lands and critical ecosystems by ignoring science and community input. This will unwittingly harm countless species and prevent communities from protecting wildlife.

OUTCOME:

On December 18, 2025, the House passed H.R. 4776, 221-196. “No” was the pro-conservation vote.