

STRIPPING NATIONAL FOREST SAFEGUARDS TO PROMOTE RECKLESS LOGGING

Passed: 232 – 188

SUMMARY:

The House passed a bill that would strip review of impacts to communities, wildlife and the environment of logging projects as large as 47 square miles on national forests. The bill would also eliminate endangered species consultation, strip public participation in decision-making and block legal review of logging projects on national forests. (*November 1, 2017, Roll Call No. 598*)

BACKGROUND:

Our 154 national forests sustain diverse ecosystems and support an incredible array of iconic animals such as grizzly bear, wolf, mountain lion, bighorn sheep, and wolverine. They are home to over 400 threatened or endangered species, including one third of the nation's listed bird species and two thirds of our imperiled fish. In addition, our forests serve as the largest single source of water in the United States. Some 180 million people in over 68,000 communities rely on these forested lands to capture and filter their drinking water. And, visits to national forests and public lands contribute to a booming outdoor recreation economy that provides 6.1 million American jobs.

Unfortunately, the Resilient Federal Forest Act 2017, H.R. 2936, would put our forests, communities and wildlife at risk. The bill promotes irresponsible logging on a massive scale across our national forests. Science shows that such large-scale logging and roadbuilding without environmental safeguards can increase the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires while also causing erosion, water contamination from herbicide use and runoff; fragmentation of pristine areas; and clear-cuts of old growth destroying habitat for sensitive and commercially important fish and wildlife from elk to salmon.

Furthermore, the bill would eliminate consultation of logging under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and compromise protection for some of America's most iconic wildlife like the Florida panther, native wild trout and black footed ferret.

One of the bill's many waivers would allow timber projects to log as much as 47 square miles of national forest without reviewing the potential harmful impacts on the environment, and without notifying the public of those impacts as would currently occur under the National Environmental Policy Act. The bill also includes provisions to block the public from going to court to enforce environmental laws and hold the government accountable when it violates the law.

In addition, the legislation fails to adequately address the critical problem of fire funding. The cost of fighting fires is consuming over half of the Forest Service's budget, starving the agency's ability to do preventative forest work that could impact fire behavior to the benefit of communities, wildlife and watersheds. The bill's wildfire funding language would not effectively fix the problem. It would leave the Forest Service spending over half of its budget (and up to two thirds of its budget by 2021) on wildfire suppression which is unsustainable and starves all national forests of resources for basic functions.

OUTCOME:

On November 1, 2017, the House passed the Resilient Federal Forest Act (H.R. 2936), 232 – 188.
“No” was the pro-conservation vote.