

HR 2578: The Anti-Environmental Bill From Hell

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HR 2578 is a collection of extreme anti-conservation proposals that would damage the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, undo decades of other public land protection measures, waive dozens of laws within 100 miles of our borders, give away old-growth forests to be clearcut, and undermine the National Environmental Policy Act. The most egregious provisions of in HR 2578 include:

- **Title I Lower Merced River** – This provision would remove federal protection from a short segment of the Merced Wild & Scenic River to allow for future expansion of McClure Reservoir. Expanding the reservoir would not only drown a segment of a formerly protected Wild River visited by thousands of rafters, kayakers, anglers, hikers, and mountain bikers every year, it would also flood critical habitat for the Limestone Salamander (a state-protected species found nowhere else on earth) and part of the federally protected Merced River Wilderness Study Area. Title I would set a dangerous precedent for rivers across the country that are protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by having Congress waive those protections when they become inconvenient to a water project proposed by developers.
- **Title VIII Reauthorization of Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act** – This provision would extend the authorization and expand the geographic scope of an controversial forest pilot project in California with no public input and would make multiple extreme policy changes that fly in the face of responsible forest management. The Quincy Library Group (QLG) pilot project was authorized in 1998 for a period of five years, and has been reauthorized twice since. The provision would reauthorize QLG for an additional ten years and expand the geographic scope to cover all national forest lands within the Sierra Nevada. The bill mandates unsustainable annual timber cut levels and would authorize logging in roadless areas, recommended wilderness areas, spotted owl habitat, and salmon habitat. In particular, this provision mandates logging in the watersheds of Deer and Mill Creeks on the Lassen National Forest. These streams were recommended for Wild & Scenic River protection by the Forest Service and support some of the last remaining wild populations of threatened Central Valley salmon and steelhead.
- **Title XIV, the National Security and Federal Lands Protection Act** – This provision would create a zone 100 miles wide along our borders with Mexico and Canada where the Department of Homeland Security would be explicitly exempt from complying with dozens of environmental, public health, and safety laws. The exemption includes an incredibly broad array of environmental laws such as the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Wilderness Act, the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, to name a few. There is zero evidence to suggest that any of the laws waived hinder border security. In fact, as part of a GAO report on the bill suggests the exact opposite.

The dissenting view of the committee report of the bill states: “The purpose of the bill is to use border security as cover to effectively repeal more than a century of environmental protection for Americans living and working along our borders with Canada and Mexico.”

- **Title III, the Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization and Jobs Protection Act** – This provision would privatize nearly 100,000 acres of public lands in the Tongass National Forest and turn them over to a private corporation. The legislation is not a multi-stakeholder solution and would go around the agreed upon lands that the Sealaska Corporation is entitled to under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The Tongass is home to the largest tracts of old-growth remaining in the United States that are vital to the livelihoods of local and commercial fishermen, hunters and guides, and native communities. This legislation would give Sealaska the right to clearcut prime lands and ship the timber directly overseas, depriving the region of vital economic resources such as tourism and the fishing industry.
- **Title XI, Grazing Improvement Act of 2012** – This title would gut conservation protects that are associated with the management of livestock grazing on federal lands and fundamentally alter the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The provision would double the current term limit for a grazing permit by extending these privileges to twenty years and would grant the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture unchecked powers to exclude the management of livestock grazing from environmental review. It would limit the public’s right to participate in the management of federal resources that belong to all citizens and set a damaging precedent for the use of NEPA going forward.