

# **Inactivities Report**

## **Committee on Natural Resources 110<sup>th</sup> Congress (2007-2008)**

*This report has not been officially adopted by the Committee on Natural Resources and may not necessarily reflect the views of its Members.*

No celebrations or congratulations marked the Committee on Natural Resources' bicentennial in 2007. And there was no reason to toss confetti or raise a toast. It is with some concern that the Republican Members of the Committee have watched missed opportunities for legislative action, oversight and investigation during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The Committee on Natural Resources, once the most active player on energy issues, cutting edge environmental policy and a vanguard in the self-determination of Native Americans and citizens of the U.S. insular areas, has devolved into the "Recreation for Limousine Liberals" Committee. Time and again, the expertise and institutional memory of the Committee were bypassed as nationally significant legislation was brought to the Floor of the House of Representatives without hearings or markups in the Committee. Moreover, the Democrat Leaders of the House diluted the Committee's authority with the creation of ad hoc committees, back door negotiations and sidestepping of formal bill conferences with the Senate.

In addition, while the energy crisis had America in a choke hold, the Committee spent its time on frivolous bills banning the interstate transport of pet monkeys (H.R. 2964) or authorizing millions of dollars in aid for foreign whooping cranes (H.R. 1771). More seriously, the Democrat Majority used its power to lock up secure domestic oil and gas resources by vastly expanding federal conservation and protected areas. The Democrats took this action even when there were no threats to these areas and the existing federal inventory suffers from neglect, severe underfunding and abuse.

The Committee on Natural Resources has traditionally been one of the most active in the House of Representatives. It is no wonder, given its vast jurisdiction over the public lands and resources of the United States. The United States owns 650 million acres of land, most of which is under the purview of the Committee, not to mention the extensive outer continental shelf reaching 200 miles or more from our shores. The ocean itself is under the Committee's sway, as well as mineral resources, water, fish and wildlife. The Committee enjoys plenary jurisdiction over Native American issues and the five territories of the United States, which stretch around the globe. Every major federal action affecting the quality of the human environment is captured by the Committee's authorship of the National Environmental Policy Act, and its actions are felt overseas through international fishery agreements.

While the first chairman of the predecessor committee of the current Committee on Natural Resources was from Pennsylvania, we must remember that in 1807, that was the far western edge of the United States. The interests of the Committee have been traditionally aligned with the western states, given the boundless natural resources located there, the large swaths of

federally-controlled land and the growing conflicts between public lands and private use by the increasing American population.

The shift away toward multiple economic uses of public lands might be attributed to the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome – the overwhelming majority of Democratic members of the Committee come from developed states with little public land or represent urban or suburban areas in western states. The current chairman is from West Virginia, a state with only 7.4% federal land. Contrast this with the Ranking Republican of the Committee, who hails from Alaska, a state where the federal government controls nearly 70% of the land base (257.6 million acres).

As detailed below are many examples where the Democrats missed an opportunity, compounded a problem, failed to take appropriate action or tucked its tail between its legs and scurried away. The country is weaker as a result, as is the Committee.

### **Energy and Mineral Resources: American Oil and Gas Supplies Locked Up**

The inactivity by the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources this Congress has been a story of absence in the face of crisis. Since the Democrats quote President Carter on its website, it should come as no surprise that when faced with a growing national energy crisis they simply froze in place, retired to their offices, and put on sweaters. However, Republican Members of the Committee were prepared to find solutions for America's families.

The 2008 hearing schedule was filled with hearings on anything but energy issues. The one hearing examining America's energy outlook<sup>1</sup>, which would have given Members a clear opportunity to address the energy needs of America, was cancelled by the Democrats. Simply stated, when faced with a hearing which might actually address the energy problem and resources America holds to solve the problem, the Democrats wanted to hear nothing of it.

After nearly a year of inaction on energy, America's economy is now suffering the consequences of the Democrats' inaction. In September, when Americans were clamouring for a solution to our energy crisis, at a time when they faced \$4 gasoline, rising food costs, and increasing taxes, the Committee responsible for legislation addressing America's energy production held a hearing on the deviant behaviour of a handful of career Department of the Interior employees.

It's not that there aren't solutions out there: the Committee has before it numerous proposals that could help solve America's energy and mineral shortages. Below are a number of issues and bills on which the Committee could have acted, but failed to do so.

Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas: On July 14, 2008, President Bush lifted the executive ban on the development and leasing of the oil and natural gas resources of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), reversing a nearly 20-year executive ban on OCS leasing and development. This significant change in federal policy left many questions facing Congress and should have

---

<sup>1</sup> Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources: Oversight Hearing on "The Energy Information Administration's 2008 Annual Energy Outlook" June 26, 2008.

immediately been the subject of a hearing. What would the impacts of opening the OCS be for America? What resources are in the OCS? Should we develop the OCS? What issues do we face: environmental, revenue sharing, infrastructure?

Sadly, even though more than 33 bills addressing development in the OCS<sup>2</sup> were pending before the Committee during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, not a single hearing was scheduled. While many of those bills either opened or closed different areas of the OCS, addressed revenue sharing or had the OCS provisions as part of a larger energy package, their sheer number emphasized the importance of this issue. However, not a single one of those bills was subject to a hearing. Although the House of Representatives considered legislation in September 2008 addressing the opening of the OCS (H.R. 6899), that bill was subject to no hearings, was not marked up at the subcommittee or Full Committee level, and no reports were issued.

State Revenue Sharing: The House Democrats' Fiscal Year 2008 omnibus spending bill included a 2% reduction in the onshore state's share of revenues from federal oil and gas production. This is a serious slap to Western states that have enjoyed a 50/50 partnership with the federal government for decades for the resources located in their state borders. The funds generated from these royalties pay health, education, and transportation costs. More importantly, these cuts will further strain budgets at a time of declining revenues as more areas are closed to oil and gas production and existing leases dry up. On February 6, 2008, Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Ranking Republican Stevan Pearce (R-NM) and Congressman Mark Udall (D-CO) both introduced legislation to address this issue.<sup>3</sup>

Although this important issue was addressed in a bipartisan fashion by legislation and had the support of more than seven Committee Members,<sup>4</sup> this topic was never subject of a hearing or a mark-up by the Committee.

Use It or Lose It Farce: The Democrats did find time to issue a staff report asserting that companies were failing to develop energy on their existing leases on federal lands. This supported their conclusion that more federal areas did not need to be open for energy development. After issuing the report, the Democrat Members introduced several bills purporting to fix this "problem:" H.R. 6515, H.R. 6251, and H.R. 6899. In a stunning repudiation of this phantom solution, these bills were all defeated in the House of Representatives. In two cases, the bills were opposed by a number of "oil patch" Democrat party members and the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Energy and Minerals. Although this was a major legislative proposal by the Democrats, this issue was never subject to hearings. Why didn't the Committee pull in agency and industry experts to testify and determine the cause of the delays in development? The answer is because the report was roundly repudiated by non-

---

<sup>2</sup> H Res 1282, HR 777, HR 944, HR 1957, HR 2758, HR 2784, HR 2918, HR 5861, HR 6009, HR 6108, HR 6207, HR 6301, HR 6302, HR 6383, HR 6384, HR 6412, HR 6418, HR 6421, HR 6428, HR 6463, HR 6529, HR 6566, HR 6593, HR 6670, HR 6709, HR 6717, HR 6724, HR 6735, HR 6781, HR 6817, HR 6824, HR 6868, and HR 6953.

<sup>3</sup> HR 5238 (Pearce) and HR 5240 (Mark Udall).

<sup>4</sup> Congressmen Pearce, Rob Bishop, Cannon, McMorris Rodgers, Sali, Don Young, and Mark Udall.

partisan experts at the American Association of Petroleum Geologists<sup>5</sup> and by the Department of the Interior.<sup>6</sup>

Mineral Policy: During the past year Americans have become painfully aware of the consequences of not producing our own abundant energy resources. Americans may be surprised to learn we are 60% or more dependent on foreign sources of 37 different non-fuel mineral commodities that play a critical role in our Nation's economy and national security. Not surprising is that this has contributed significantly to the Nation's current economic downturn. In 2007, the "value added to the Nation's gross domestic product by major industries that consume processed mineral materials was \$2,210 billion."<sup>7</sup>

Rather than evaluating policy and legislative proposals that would encourage more domestic production of non-fuel mineral resources from federal lands currently managed for multiple use, the Democrats passed H.R. 2262, the Hardrock Mining and Reclamation Act of 2007. Had this bill been signed into law, existing mines operating on federal lands would close prematurely and new mine development on federal lands currently open to mineral entry would be precluded because of the untenable regulatory and legal environment established by the legislation. According to the Democrats, there is "no reason, no reason whatsoever, why 'good public land law' should be linked to the gross national product."<sup>8</sup>

Part of the driving force behind the Democrat's outdated approach to mining law reform are the problems associated with abandoned hardrock mines (AML) found throughout the Western United States. Many of these mines were operated in the 1800s and early 1900s decades before the enactment of the Nation's environmental and land management laws in the late 1960s and 1970s. These environmental statutes provide the legal authority for the regulatory framework that governs modern mining and reclamation practices in the United States. Mining company bankruptcies from the late 1990s and early 2000s with inadequate reclamation bonds have also been problematic. The Administration has revised the bonding requirements eliminating this problem in the event of future bankruptcies.

Two bills were introduced in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress that could have helped to address this problem. Both were ignored by the Democrats: H.R.4685, the Minerals Reclamation Foundation Act of 2007; and H.R. 5661, which amends the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act to authorize uncertified states and tribes to use reclamation funds for reclamation of non-coal AML sites.

H.R. 4685, introduced by Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources Ranking Republican Stevan Pearce, was modeled on other statutes creating successful foundations to support agencies and programs within the Department of the Interior, such as the Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

---

<sup>5</sup> Letter from AAPG President Willard Green dated June 23, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary Stephen Allred dated June 25, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/mcs/2008/mcs2008.pdf> (Pgs. 5 and 6).

<sup>8</sup> Chairman Nick J. Rahall II, Full Committee Markup of HR 2262, on October 23, 2007.

The Mineral Reclamation Foundation would be able to solicit contributions from the general public for the purpose of reclaiming and securing both abandoned hardrock and coal mine sites. These two bills would augment the existing AML programs operated by the land management agencies and provide those Americans with a desire to improve the quality of the environment an opportunity to address a tangible problem.

Oil and Gas Resources of the Arctic Coastal Plain: According to the U.S. Geological Survey, there are 10.4 billion barrels of technically recoverable oil beneath the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). One hundred percent of this oil is economically recoverable at oil prices above \$60 per barrel, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. This translates into 1 million barrels of oil per day of additional supply to America (the same amount produced in all of 2007 by the State of Texas). Most legislation allowing development of the ANWR coastal plain limits the acreage to be disturbed to only 2000 acres, .001 of the total 19.6 million acres of ANWR. Despite full-color advertisements to the contrary, there are no mountains or other picturesque landscapes on the coastal plain, a treeless, grass-tufted flat land 79 miles from the existing Trans-Alaska Pipeline carrying oil from Prudhoe Bay, Alaska.

In the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, 23 bills were introduced to open the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil and gas development, the “largest unexplored, potentially productive geological onshore basin in the United States.”<sup>9</sup> Only a single bill was introduced to permanently lock up those resources. The 23 pro-ANWR bills were supported by 196 bipartisan cosponsors (182 Republicans and 14 Democrats). Number of hearings held on any of these bills: zero. Number of mark-ups: zero. Loss to the federal treasury: a total \$136 billion over 30 years (includes bonus bids, rents, royalties, and corporate income taxes) according to the Congressional Research Service.

Energy on Public Lands: The Democrat leadership of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public lands failed to hold a single hearing on the Nation’s energy crisis. Instead, H.R. 6, authored by Committee Chairman Rahall, restricted the ability to create more wind energy on public lands and stripped away grant programs that would help create more biomass energy. Further, the Committee failed to do anything about the maintenance of energy and transmission rights-of-way across our public lands. Power companies throughout Western states, especially in California, are worried about the inability to clear trees and vegetation from the areas surrounding power lines. This seriously increases the risk of wildfires and widespread power outages.

Energy Transmission Corridors: Our Nation has an electricity transmission system that has witnessed little investment, is not adequate and will be completely unreliable without action. Bipartisan provisions were put in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 to build more transmission along designated energy corridors on federal lands, yet the Democrat leadership of the Committee unsuccessfully tried to repeal these provisions in Section 103 of H.R. 2337. The Democrats have ignored the fact that corridors and the new transmission that they will bring could help spur more renewable energy generation in rural areas.

---

<sup>9</sup>Energy Information Administration [2000](#).

## **Public Lands Opportunities Squandered**

America is blessed with an abundance of public lands that are rich in natural beauty and economic resources. If Congress sets the right course, these lands can make a major contribution to our quality of life, our recreational opportunities, our national security, our energy independence and our economic well-being. But when Congress fails to act or when Congress acts to prevent Americans from using their resources wisely, it is guilty of squandering the unique opportunities our country has been given.

Instead of working to meet our urgent need to secure reliable, domestic sources of energy, minerals, forest products and food, instead of expanding opportunities for all Americans to enjoy our beautiful public lands for wholesome outdoor recreation, our current Congressional leaders directed Congress to turn its back to these issues. Instead of reforming the maze of bureaucratic requirements and special interest litigation that prevent us from improving the health and productivity of our forests, they have kept us on a path that leads only to catastrophic fires, insect devastation, and job loss from closed mills.

Second Amendment Rights: The 110<sup>th</sup> Congress was greeted with unprecedented momentum to restore Second Amendment Rights to the National Park System. Despite the success of National Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management regulations which conform to state and local gun laws, Congressional leaders and the National Park Service (NPS) have resisted common-sense gun policies to protect the rights of law-abiding citizens. At every opportunity, Republican Members raised the issue through questioning of NPS hearing witnesses and by offering gun rights amendments in Committee mark-ups and on the Floor of the House of Representatives. Despite these efforts, the Democrats refused to support the Second Amendment by defeating or watering down gun-rights amendments and failing to hold a single oversight hearing on the issue. Additionally, Committee Democrat members cleared the way for thousands of acres now open to sportsmen to be included in National Park designations where they will fall prey to draconian anti-gun regulation.<sup>10</sup>

Wilderness Study Areas: Since enactment of the Wilderness Act of 1964, approximately 98 million acres of federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Forest Service have been designated as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Wilderness is the most restrictive of federal land use designations - evidence of man's imprint on nature is to be avoided at all costs. These WSAs are effectively managed as wilderness pending agency analysis to determine suitability as wilderness areas. Wilderness suitability studies have been completed on approximately 97 million of those acres. The three agencies have determined that 18 million of those acres meet the criteria for wilderness designation. The remaining 79 million acres do not meet the criteria to be classified as wilderness and under the Wilderness Act should be released for multiple use management. The Democrat leadership of the Natural Resources Committee has not acted to clear the backlog of WSA decisions. It has not acted to release the 79 million unqualified acres for multiple use management, including energy development. However, the Democrats did find the time to hold

---

<sup>10</sup> For example, see HR 1286, HR 1483, HR 1847, HR 2197, HR 3998, HR 4828 and HR 5853.

a hearing on a massive wilderness bill, H.R. 1975, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, which locked up millions of acres of resource-rich lands, as well as heavily forested areas in need of thinning to prevent catastrophic wildfires. This bill, authored by a member of Congress from New York City, was introduced over the objections of the representatives of the affected Congressional districts.

No Oversight on Agency Wrongdoing: One of the most important functions of a Congressional committee is to investigate wrongdoing by government officials. The Democrats' interest in agency wrongdoing has been politically selective. For example, in July 2008, the Department of the Interior's Inspector General released a report detailing unethical behavior by National Park Service (NPS) employees at Point Reyes National Seashore in California. The investigation revealed that an oyster farmer was the victim of an NPS effort to destroy his family business. The IG found that senior NPS scientists misrepresented scientific data regarding the oyster farm and subverted the public interest by failing to comply with a document request under the Freedom of Information Act. The Democrats took no action and failed to hold a single oversight hearing on the wrongdoing.

Renewable Biomass: The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 excludes biomass removed from federal lands from consideration as a renewable fuel source. Litigation and large-scale insect infestations in several regions of the United States, accumulation of fuel materials and prolonged drought have increased the likelihood of unusually severe wildfires that pose a threat to lives and property in nearby communities. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 was intended to facilitate removal of biomass from forest lands, particularly those located within the wildland-urban interface, to reduce the fuels for severe wildfires. Reducing the risk of severe wildfires would be greatly facilitated if the biomass removed in connection with hazardous fuel reduction projects were considered a source of renewable fuel for purposes of the renewable fuel standard established by subtitle A of title II of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007. The Democratic leadership in Congress was unwilling to act on bipartisan bills to correct this error, H.R. 3072 and H.R. 5236.

Wildland Fire: The Democrat leadership of the Natural Resources Committee has not fulfilled its oversight role with regard to wildland fuel reduction and fires. There has not been a single oversight hearing since June 2007 on either subject. No bills addressing the need to increase treatments of hazardous fuels have been considered. The FLAME Act (H.R. 5541) as passed by the House of Representatives does not address the budgetary need to separate emergency wildfire funding from routine agency appropriations. The Committee refused even to hold hearings on H.R. 4245, a bill by Congressman Bill Sali (R-ID) that would have provided a way to end the Forest Service paralysis communities face when action is needed to promote forest health and lessen the threat of catastrophic fires.

Wild Horses and Burros: The Committee Democrats have chosen to allow sentimentality to override scientific natural resource management needs on public lands with regard to wild horses and burros. There have been no oversight hearings on this controversial and costly program managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service. The only bill passed by the Committee and the House (H.R. 249) actually limited management options for the agencies

by removing language that allowed for sale of excess animals. Rising fuel and feed costs have seen the program's costs explode well beyond what was budgeted.

**Border Security:** The Committee has failed to hold hearings or move any legislation that would protect our federal lands from the devastating effects of illegal immigration across our border lands. There are more than 23.8 million acres of National Forest System lands within 50 miles of the Mexican and Canadian borders.<sup>11</sup> The Coronado National Forest in Arizona has the highest incidence of illegal border crossings in the country, with nearly a half million incidents in 2005. Almost 99,000 pounds of marijuana (worth \$198 million on the street) were seized in transit through the forest. Portions of the National Park Service managed Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Arizona have been closed to the public because of safety concerns associated with illegal immigration and drug trafficking. In fact, a park ranger was killed on duty while aiding Border Patrol agents capture; two accused murders who fled Mexico in a stolen SUV driven through a hole in a fence dividing the Monument from Mexico. According to the Monument Superintendent, half the annual budget for the Monument goes directly to problems caused by illegal immigration.<sup>12</sup> National Wildlife Refuges along 158 miles of border in Arizona, Texas, and California have become prime habitat for not only endangered pronghorn sheep and masked bobwhite quail, but also smugglers, illegal immigrants, and drug runners.<sup>13</sup>

Wilderness areas have become a haven for criminal activity because Border Patrol and law enforcement agencies are unable to adequately patrol these remote areas.<sup>14</sup> Criminal gangs based in both the U.S. and Mexico take advantage of the lawlessness on federal lands and often rape, rob, and kill those who are crossing the border illegally.<sup>15</sup> Park and Forest rangers are obviously at increased risk, not to mention visitors to our federal lands. This situation also damages the very natural resources these parks and forests were created to protect. In the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge alone, more than 500 tons of trash per year are left behind by illegal crossers, along with human waste, contained water supplies, 100 abandoned vehicles, and more than 1300 miles of illegal trails and roads.<sup>16</sup> Wildfires spread from campfires and rescue fires and cut fences or breached border walls result in cattle trespass. Repairing this damage divert rangers and biologists from resources management duties and creates hazards for visitors.

### **Crumbling Water Infrastructure**

---

<sup>11</sup>Testimony of Abigail Kimball, Regional Forester, U.S.D.A. Forest Service before the Committee on Resources (August 28, 2006).

<sup>12</sup>Ruse, Caroline E., "Illegal Immigration a Drain on Wilderness Areas," [www.sports.espn.go.com](http://www.sports.espn.go.com) (21 September 2006).

<sup>13</sup>Testimony of Mitch Ellis, Refuge Manager, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before the House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies (15 June 2006).

<sup>14</sup>Banks, Leo W., Following the Amnesty Trail, [www.tucsonweekly.com](http://www.tucsonweekly.com) (published Feb. 15, 2007).

<sup>15</sup>Testimony of Mitch Ellis, *supra*.

<sup>16</sup>*Id.*

The Democrat leadership of the Committee has not focused on the need to rehabilitate our Nation's crumbling water infrastructure. The West is what it is today because of the legendary dams and water delivery systems built in the last century. Despite the best efforts of hard-working folks on the ground, these water facilities are crumbling at a rapid rate due to age. While the Democrat leadership of the Subcommittee on Water Resources has focused on recycling water for southern California and San Francisco, it has failed to have one hearing at how we keep our traditional Western water infrastructure from falling apart. The Committee should look at all of the tools in the water supply toolbox – not just the ones that help urban America.

### **Lack of Legislative Due Diligence in Fish and Wildlife Arena**

While the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans conducted more than 40 legislative and oversight hearings, its list of accomplishments under the new Democratic Majority was meager and the roll call of expired and unauthorized Federal wildlife and ocean conservation statutes was staggering.

No Reauthorization Leadership: Among the list of bills that were not reauthorized were such landmark ocean conservation laws as the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, the Coral Reef Conservation and Partnership Act of 2000, the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, the National Marine Sanctuaries Act of 1972, and the Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Act of 1999. While it is difficult to move major proposals through the legislative process, this task becomes impossible when the new Majority fails to even introduce a reauthorization bill in the case of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, conduct a Subcommittee mark-up of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act reauthorization bill or a Full Committee markup of a Coastal Zone Management Act bill.

Endangered Species on Life Support: While this record of failure and an almost total lack of notable accomplishments is itself stunning, this is not the whole story. For a complete lack of leadership, the Democrat members of the Committee on Natural Resources deserve an Oscar for pretending they care about the Endangered Species Act (ESA). While the Full Committee did conduct three “show trial” hearings to highlight the alleged misdeeds of a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior, one might question the thousands of taxpayer dollars spent to conduct these hearings given that the Department's Office of Inspector General had already concluded “[w]e discovered no illegal activity on [the employee's] part.”

Instead of wasting the Committee's time and valuable resources, we should have been holding hearings and mark-ups on the dozens of bills introduced by both Democrats and Republicans to reform various aspects of the ESA. In fact, the Committee held no hearings and no mark-ups on any ESA legislation in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. One could understand this attitude if the Endangered Species Act was working well; however, by any objective standard, this Act and its fundamental goal to recover listed species is a dismal failure.

Let's look at the facts. Today, there are 1,990 species listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA. Of this total, 1,356 species spend at least part of their existence in the United States. Only 22 of these species have recovered to the point where they can be delisted under the Act.

This represents an astonishing recovery rate of **less than 1 percent**. We must not forget that the ESA was never intended to be just a listing statute but one designed to actually recover species. If these were human heart patients instead of critters, plants and insects, the Congress and the American people would demand that the hospital administrator be fired, the Board of Directors be replaced and the critically ill patients be moved immediately to another facility. Continuing this medical analogy, the Democrat leadership of the House Natural Resources Committee has decided to retain the same doctors, retain the hospital Board of Directors and lock the hospital doors so the critically endangered patients can't escape to seek the medical treatment they desperately need to recover. While it may be a difficult task to extend this landmark conservation law, the Democrats have decided it is not worth the effort; they are content with a one percent recovery rate and have apparently concluded that nothing in the ESA merits change, modernization or reform. The Republicans beg to differ, finding that the ESA has been transformed from a wildlife recovery statute to a money-generated tool wielded by radical environmental groups to prevent needed economic development and energy with little impact on wildlife sustainability.

### **Self Governance in Insular Areas Threatened**

Proposed Marine Monument Opposed by Local Leaders: Intense public opposition in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) has led to the vast majority of people in the CNMI and its government to oppose an expected marine monument designation by President Bush. While, the federal government plans to establish the marine reserve in the territory's northern islands to conserve 115 thousand square miles of ocean to protect the biodiversity of the area, the Director of CNMI's Division of Fish and Wildlife, Sylvan Igisomar, is questioning the urgency of the proposal and says there are already sufficient safeguards in place as the waters around the three islands are already considered marine protected areas. Mostly importantly, Igisomar says establishing a monument would also remove the rights of local people to decide how to regulate the CNMI's ocean resources. A Joint Resolution already adopted by the CNMI legislature asks President Bush to reject the marine monument proposal.

The most notable proponent of the monument, the Washington, D.C.-based Pew Environment Group, has consistently ignored local sentiment saying they know what is best for the local economy and their cultural preservation interests: "We have a rare opportunity to permanently protect these ocean waters in a way that will benefit the CNMI's unique marine environment, promote tourism, enhance research and education, and boost the local economy now and for generations to come," said Jay Nelson, director of the Ocean Legacy Program of the Pew Environment Group, in a letter to the public.

No hearings have been held by the Democrats on this issue of local self-governance.

### **Conclusion**

The Democrat leadership of the Natural Resources Committee has focused on putting environmental interest groups first and common people last. The Committee has consistently pursued a "parks, leisure and recreation" attitude above other important matters. American

energy independence, ensuring landowner rights, and fiscal sanity have been mere afterthoughts in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The new Democrat Majority of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress promised more oversight and accountability, yet the Natural Resources Committee has not even come close to the oversight scrutiny pursued by the now Minority in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. Instead, the Committee has been fixated on pursuing sensationalized, negative headlines in urban newspapers, and environmental newsletters and blogs. It has done little to help the people who put food on America's tables and those who keep the water taps running and our lights on. We think it's time for the Democrats to stop complaining and to start rolling up their sleeves to help all of America, not just the privileged and urban elite.