



# Committee on Natural Resources

Rep. Nick J. Rahall, II - Chairman

1324 Longworth House Office Building - Washington DC, 20515 - <http://resourcescommittee.house.gov>

## Agenda of American Values Continues in 2008 December 2007

Upon assuming the chairmanship of the House Natural Resources Committee at the start of the 110th Congress, Rep. Nick J. Rahall released an Agenda of American Values to assist in guiding and shaping the Committee's priorities throughout the coming years. Commencing another year under Rahall's leadership, the Committee has outlined its 2008 agenda – one that will continue to pursue policies in line with American expectations for conserving our Nation's precious natural resources and unique cultural heritage for this and future generations to enjoy. The Committee will continue to strive to honor its commitment to serve the natural environment, wild lands, scenic vistas, fish and wildlife, and most importantly – the people.

### National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

- **Addressing the skyrocketing costs of combating wildfires:** The failure of the Administration to budget appropriately for the escalating costs of wildland fire suppression activities on Federal lands is seriously undercutting already constrained funding resources of the Interior and Agriculture Departments. Wildland fire suppression currently accounts for 45% of the Forest Service budget and the agency has had to "rob Peter to pay Paul", taking monies from other Forest Service programs to cover these costs. Legislation will be developed to address this growing crisis, which is already adversely impacting the many families living near forest lands across the country.
- **Exposing the exploitation of our public lands:** Rampant, nearly unfettered energy development on Federal lands continues despite ever-increasing evidence of the serious resource impacts caused by this activity. Hearings will explore the current imbalance which allows such exploitation to supersede all of the public's other uses of their Federal lands – including hunting, fishing, hiking, camping and a host of other recreational activities that Americans are privileged to enjoy.
- **National Parks Centennial Challenge:** Efforts will continue to pass legislation aimed at bolstering the budget of the National Park Service, approaching its 100th year, in order to allow the Park Service to effectively implement its mission and serve the needs of the American people.

- **Wilderness Designations:** Consideration will be given to designating additional federal wilderness areas within units of the National Forest System, preserving God's handiwork in its most pristine form.

### **Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans**

- **Trade in Endangered Species:** Evidence is mounting that the lucrative trade in endangered animals and animal parts is helping to finance groups involved in dangerous criminal and terrorist activity (the 'blood diamonds' of wildlife). Efforts will be made to expose this activity and determine effective enforcement options to protect public safety and promote species conservation.
- **Impacts of Climate Change on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans:** Hearings will be held to examine how Federal, State and local governments are planning for the effects of a changing climate on coastal areas, fisheries and wildlife resources.
- **Combating Invasive Species:** Efforts will be taken to examine the most effective means to address the impact of invasive species on marine and terrestrial environments. These efforts will include determining how best to ensure adequate screening and monitoring of fish and wildlife imported into the United States can be done to limit the potential risk of invasive species to the environment and the economy.
- **Overfishing on the High Seas:** Illegal fishing in international waters contributes to overfishing and upsets marine ecosystems. In turn, domestic fishermen and consumers are harmed when cheap, illegally harvested fish are imported into the United States. Consideration will be given to incentives to reduce overfishing in international waters and ensure the balance needed to maintain fisheries for the long-term and preserve jobs for America's fishermen and fishing communities.

### **Energy and Mineral Resources**

- **Advancing Carbon Sequestration:** Efforts will continue to examine the potential of Federal lands as sites for carbon sequestration by reviewing the applicability of laws such as the Mineral Leasing Act and the Federal Land Policy Management Act.
- **Oil and Gas Program Inspection and Enforcement:** According to the Bureau of Land Management "inspection and enforcement is the single most critical activity that ultimately ensures protection of the natural environment and proper management of ecosystems with regard to the impacts of oil and gas activities." Yet, GAO has found serious backlogs in lease inspections, including those for reclamation, due to the growth in permits and budgetary constraints. Hearings will delve into this matter in search of solutions.

- **Federal Oil and Gas Royalty Management:** Building upon hearings conducted in 2007, examination will continue into the problems plaguing the Interior Department's work to collect all royalties owed to the American public as a result of oil and gas leasing and production activities. The Royalty-In-Kind Program, for instance, is the subject of multiple criminal investigations and merits further Congressional scrutiny.
- **Offshore Non-Conventional Energy Development:** While proposed offshore wind and ocean energy projects provide potential as valuable sources of clean, renewable energy, the advancement of these technologies raise important questions about whether adequate regulatory mechanisms are in place to mitigate their potential effects on fish, wildlife, and the public. Hearings will examine this expanding industry.

### **Water and Power**

- **Adapting to Climate Change and Drought:** Unprecedented growth, drought, and changing weather patterns are stressing the water infrastructure of the West. Traditional water supply and delivery systems are unable to meet expanding demands of agriculture and municipal users without significantly affecting environmental quality. Proactively addressing the water needs of western communities will be a high priority through adequately funding water reuse strategies and promoting water conservation and planning.
- **Renewable Energy:** The role of the Bonneville Power Administration and Western Area Power Administration in promoting renewable energy development and ensuring sufficient energy supplies for families across the West will be examined.

### **Insular Affairs**

- **Empowering Insular Areas:** As well as reviewing the political status of U.S. territorial possessions, efforts will continue to ensure that Federal resources provided for individuals residing in the insular areas are meeting their intended goals.

### **Indian Affairs**

- **Tribal Recognition:** The Federal recognition process is broken and efforts will continue to replace it with a generic system that better meets the needs of all interested parties. In the interim, consideration will continue to be given to legislation recognizing individual Indian tribes.

- **Addressing the Plight of Native Youth:** Hearings will be conducted to explore the unfortunate circumstances and address the problems plaguing Native American youth. In particular, hearings will examine the challenges surrounding school facilities, nutrition, suicide, drugs, and gangs.
- **Law Enforcement:** The protection of home lands and tribal citizens continues to be a priority, and consideration will be given to tribal law enforcement funding and training needs.
- **Delivering on the Trust Responsibility to Indian Country:** Originally established to oversee trust fund reform, the Office of Special Trustee has subsumed dozens of programs and millions of dollars from the Bureau of Indian Affairs which many in Indian Country say is not working for them. Hearings and potential legislation may be developed to address this issue as the Office of Special Trustee approaches an expected sunset.