



News from the
Committee on Natural Resources
Rep. Nick J. Rahall, II - Chairman

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

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CONTACT:
Allyson Groff or Blake Androff, 202-226-9019

Rahall Touts Landmark Victories for America's Natural Resources
House Approves 210 Natural Resources Measures in 110th Congress

Washington, D.C. – As the 110th Congress draws to a close, House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) highlighted the many landmark legislative victories for America's natural resources over the past two years, made possible by the Democratic Majority that has begun to move the Nation in a new direction.

“From the very moment I was privileged to receive the gavel, I vowed to lead this Committee in a new direction – one that would reclaim America's interest in striking a critical balance between the job-providing, economy-boosting development of our resources and their wise conservation,” said Rahall. “We have a certain duty to ensure that our public lands continue to provide forest and range for unique American wildlife and to serve as a place for citizens to seek inspiration and renewal – a touchstone of who we are and what we stand for as Americans.”

Under Chairman Rahall's leadership, the Committee performed long-overdue oversight of the Department of the Interior, which was allowed to operate virtually unchecked under the former Republican-led Congress. In all, nearly 170 oversight and legislative hearings were held at the full committee and subcommittee levels during the 110th Congress. The unprecedented oversight of the Department of the Interior resulted in the discovery of fraud, abuse, and possible illegal activities by some current and former employees of the Interior Department.

Upon taking the helm of the Committee under the new Democratic Majority, Rahall released an *Agenda of American Values* to assist in guiding the Committee during the 110th Congress. To date, the House of Representatives has approved an extraordinary 210 legislative measures within the Committee's jurisdiction.

Making great strides to achieve this success in a bipartisan fashion, 120 of these measures were sponsored by Democratic Members and 90 by Republicans. Rahall noted that, consensus-building and bipartisan cooperation were key to the Committee's achieving the successes of the 110th Congress.

“I commend the Members of the Committee for working in a bipartisan manner to ensure that the land and resources are preserved as God intended, while taking into account local concerns and needs,” said Rahall. “We are continually faced with the seemingly insurmountable task of striking an appropriate balance between conservation and resource development, and I am pleased to have worked with Members from both sides of the aisle in doing so.”

As Chairman, Rahall worked diligently to ensure that the largest collection of natural resources measures to emerge from the Congress since 1996 became law. Fifty-seven of the sixty-two bills included in the ***Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008 (S. 2739)*** – nearly evenly split between bills sponsored by Democrats and Republicans – originated in the House Natural Resources Committee, where Rahall worked closely with his Subcommittee Chairmen and Chairwomen to advance measures through the House.

During the 110th Congress, Rahall and Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Chairman Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) made significant strides in designating additional lands as wilderness through House passage of seven wilderness proposals totaling nearly one-half million acres – an area roughly 13 times the size of the District of Columbia. Grijalva also secured House passage of legislation authorizing the 27 million acre National Landscape Conservation System. As wildfires ravaged California and other parts of the country earlier this year, Grijalva worked with Rahall to advance legislation through the House to create a dedicated federal fund for catastrophic, emergency wildland fire suppression activities. To help rural communities across the country on the brink of economic hardship, Grijalva oversaw the critical reauthorization of county timber payments, which was signed into law on October 3, 2008.

With the leadership of Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources Committee Chairman Jim Costa (D-CA), Rahall marshaled House passage of comprehensive reform of the Hardrock Mining Law of 1872 – an antiquated law governing the extraction of hardrock minerals from public lands.

Within the first 100 legislative hours of the 110th Congress, Rahall led the House in taking swift action to fulfill its promise to recoup billions in taxpayer funded subsidies to Big Oil and advance legislation that would put the Nation on a path to energy independence, strengthen our national security, grow the economy and create new jobs, and lower energy prices. Rahall also led the House in passage of legislation that would open up roughly 85 percent of all oil in the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), while protecting the financial interests of American citizens in the leasing of federal resources, and safeguarding the environment. Rahall remains committed to addressing America’s growing energy needs by requiring responsible development of oil and gas resources in the ocean and on public lands, and ensuring accountability in royalty management.

Subcommittee on Water and Power Chairwoman Grace Napolitano (D-CA) focused on promoting more sustainable water supplies for the West by pushing innovative water projects that provide new water through conservation and reuse. Under her leadership, the House passed critical legislation to protect major dams and power plants, such as the Hoover and Grand Coulee dams, from terrorist attacks.

Congresswoman Madeleine Bordallo (D-GU) helped lead the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans to bolster American leadership in the protection of threatened wildlife around the globe and the conservation of ocean and coral reef resources that are critical to the health of our marine species. Bordallo sought to counter the Administration's neglect of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the Administration's abysmal record of protecting wildlife species and their habitats.

Rahall and Subcommittee on Insular Affairs Chairwoman Donna Christensen (D-VI) helped push legislation to reform the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) immigration system, which was signed into law on May 8, 2008. The law will address nearly two decades of concerns about the CNMI's immigration policy, undo years of political maneuvering by disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, and strengthen the security of our borders against smugglers and terrorists who seek to gain access through the U.S. territories. Christensen also held several hearings on issues affecting each U.S. territory – the political status of Puerto Rico, the economic effects of raising the U.S. minimum wage on American Samoa, the conveyance of submerged lands and school construction on the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the U.S. military buildup set to occur on Guam.

Rahall paved the way for House passage of several long-awaited Native American tribal recognitions, including for the Virginia tribes which met the English settlers at Jamestown. Rahall secured Committee approval of the reauthorization of the vital Indian Health Care Improvement Act and introduced legislation mandating that the Administration consult with tribes on policies that directly affect their lives, to ensure tribes are getting a fair seat at the bargaining table.

A series of oversight hearings on and investigations of the endangered species program revealed that several listing decisions and critical habitat designations were compromised when political appointees inappropriately meddled in science-based decisions. After the Administration announced proposed regulations to undermine the Endangered Species Act, Rahall led the effort in the House urging the Administration not to attempt to rush changes in its waning days to weaken the landmark conservation law.

Another series of oversight hearings documented rampant fraud and failure in the collection of oil and gas royalties – potentially costing American taxpayers billions of dollars in lost royalties owed to the American people. An Inspector General investigation revealed unethical and illegal behavior by more than a dozen current and former employees of the Minerals Management Service's Royalty in Kind (RIK) program. Costa held over a dozen Subcommittee oversight hearings on energy-related issues and Rahall has been the driving force behind eight Government Accountability Office energy reports released during the 110th Congress.

"I'm very pleased with the accomplishments we made this Congress. They will help to lay the foundation for our work next year with a new Administration. I remain optimistic about our ability to continue to work in a bipartisan fashion to provide essential new protections for wilderness, National Parks, precious water resources, historic sites, and citizens from sea to shining sea. I am proud that my Chairmanship has been, and will continue to be, about enriching the Nation and all its inhabitants of today, mindful of our obligation to pass this inheritance on to the generations of tomorrow," Rahall said.