NATIONAL SECURITY AND LANDS PROTECTION ACT?

The proponents of bills in Congress, like the authors of California ballot propositions, can be very adept at creating misleading titles. The "National Security and Federal Lands Protection Act" (H.R. 1505) is a good example. It has nothing to do with lands protection. H.R. 1505, which has been reported out of Committee but not voted on by the House, prohibits the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior from taking action under the environmental protection laws which would impede the border security activities of the Secretary of Homeland Security. It further specifies that the Secretary of Homeland Security shall have immediate access to any public land managed by the federal government for the purpose of conducting border security activities, including construction and maintenance of roads and fences, use of patrol vehicles and installation of monitoring equipment.

The bill is in the form of a waiver of more than 30 important environmental laws, including the Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act and the National Park Service Organic Act. This waiver of the environmental laws for border security activities would apply within the area extending 100 MILES FROM ALL SECTIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL LAND AND MARITIME BORDERS OF THE U.S. The waiver area would cover the residence locations of about two-thirds of the U.S. population, and would include national parks, wilderness areas and wildlife refuges. In California a 100 mile zone from the coastal and Mexican borders would constitute nearly 40 percent of the state.

The Department of Homeland Security did not ask Congress for this waiver of the environmental laws, and the text of H.R. 1505 does not contain any Congressional findings of need. Although it is limited to border security activities, they are loosely defined and could be destructive. The bill clearly is not intended to protect lands, as part of its title implies, but is another effort to weaken the environmental laws under the guise of national security. The bill was sponsored by Representative Bishop of Utah, a non-border state. Our 2nd District Congressman, Wally Herger, was one of the co-sponsors. To voice opposition to H.R. 1505, telephone, email or write your congressman and U.S. Senators at the addresses listed on the government pages of the telephone book.