

House backs bill to boost hunting, fishing on public lands

February 27 2016, by Matthew Daly

The House on Friday approved a bill to expand access to hunting and fishing areas on public lands, extend protections for the use of lead bullets in hunting and strip wolves of federal protections in four states.

The [bill](#) also would let hunters import 41 polar bear carcasses shot in Canada before they were declared threatened in 2008 and allow limited imports of ivory from African elephants.

The bill was approved, 242-161, and now goes to the Senate. Twelve Democrats joined 230 Republicans in favor of the measure.

Supporters said the bill would protect and expand the rights of sportsmen to hunt, fish and enjoy other recreation on [public lands](#).

"Washington bureaucrats don't understand that federal lands can be used in multiple ways," said House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. "By overregulating, these bureaucrats do a lot of damage to our fishermen, shooters and outdoor enthusiasts, stopping perfectly legal and safe outdoor activities. Washington regulations should enable access (to public lands), not stop it."

Opponents said the bill would roll back important protections for [wolves](#) and other wildlife and undermine international efforts to combat ivory trafficking.

"This legislation would open up our most pristine protected lands to road-

building, motorized vehicles and other activities that undermine the explicit intent of the Wilderness Act," said Gene Karpinski, president of the League of Conservation Voters.

The bill waives crucial environmental reviews for decisions affecting hundreds of millions of acres of federal lands, diverts funding meant for conservation and threatens to increase the amount of lead poisoning of birds and other wildlife, Karpinski said.

The bill also contains a provision to remove gray wolves in the Great Lakes region and Wyoming off the federal endangered list. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has long said that wolf populations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Wyoming have all recovered enough to return responsibility for managing the animals to the state.

The agency has made several attempts to take wolves in the four states off the endangered list but has been blocked by federal courts. The House bill bars further court challenges.

Wolves are well-established in the western Great Lakes and Northern Rockies after being shot, poisoned and trapped into near-extirpation in the lower 48 states in the last century. Altogether, their estimated population now exceeds 5,000.

Animal protection advocates contend the wolves' situation remains uncertain and have sued repeatedly over more than a decade to block efforts to remove them from protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Drew Caputo, vice president of the environmental group Earthjustice, called the House vote unfortunate. If enacted, the legislation "could prove devastating for the recovery of wolves in the continental United States," Caputo said.

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