Some in GOP Push for Conservation Causes

Local News

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Seattle, WA - Support for many environmental causes seems to run strictly along party lines, but a group of Republicans is trying to change that in Congress. They are asking House Speaker John Boehner to help push 19 bills through the House to designate new wilderness areas, conserve wetlands and fight invasive species in 14 states.

In Washington state, the list includes expanding the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area, which has long been stalled. Jim DiPeso, spokesman for Republicans for Environmental Protection, acknowledges Congress has been swamped, but he sees no good reason to delay bills that lawmakers actually agree on.

One of the issues we keep hearing about wilderness legislation is 'You need to have local support.' The Alpine Lakes wilderness bill has local support - from Republicans, from Democrats, from business, from all walks of life. So, what's the holdup? Let's pass it, let's get it done. - Jim DiPeso

The Alpine Lakes bill (HR 608) had its last subcommittee hearing in October. The group is urging Speaker Boehner to take up the package of conservation bills as quickly as possible.

The group's mission, says DiPeso, is to move the GOP more to the ideological center when it comes to conservation. He points out that some of the nation's major environmental decisions were made by Republican presidents, from Teddy Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan, and says current efforts do not have to be so contentious.

"As former Gov. Dan Evans liked to say, there are no Republican rivers and there are no Democratic mountains. All these lands are for all Americans, for all time."

In a recent hearing, House Natural Resources Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) said designating more wilderness could restrict access for job-creating activities like logging and mining. But DiPeso's group points out that plenty of public land exists for multiple use, and wilderness also brings economic benefits to an area.

More information is available at www.rep.org.