

WA Sportsmen, Native Americans Denounce House-Passed Border Bill

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The U.S. House of Representatives late Tuesday voted to ease rules for Border Patrol agents, and the measure is causing concern among sportsmen, Native Americans and other advocates for public land.

Supporters say the measure will protect the country from illegal activity such as drug smugglers - but Adam McKenney doubts that threat is very real. McKenney, an outdoor enthusiast and owner of Leavenworth Mountain Sports, hopes the Senate will block the bill, which was approved by a vote of 232 to 188.

They just use this excuse of 'national security.' They don't have to prove anything before they just start taking our land. They don't have to prove that we even need this. - Adam McKenney
The House-passed measure would ease environmental restrictions along a 100-mile stretch of both the Canadian and Mexican borders. McKenney says Washingtonians need to know this measure would affect some of the state's most pristine public land, including North Cascades and Olympic national parks.

The House measure exempted tribes, but Kesner Flores, interim director of the National Tribal Environmental Council, is concerned that the Senate version of the bill contains no such exemption. The House version affects swaths of land along both the northern and southern U.S. borders, which he says are home to numerous tribes.

"That actually are homelands to a lot of native nations, who have their sovereignty issues and the nations; endangered species, and habitat and other things that are there that might be impacted, or could be impacted and probably will be impacted by this bill."

Flores says the Obama administration and federal public lands rules require that tribes be consulted before making these types of major changes. Rep. Dave Reichert, R-Wash., whose district includes some areas affected by the bill, voted against it.