

"The worst Interior & Environment Appropriations bill I've seen in my 35 years of service on the Subcommittee"

WASHINGTON, D.C.-- House Appropriations Committee Ranking Democratic Member Rep. Norm Dicks made the following comments at a press conference today on the Republican Majorities' Interior & Environment Appropriations bill for FY12. He was joined by Subcommittee Ranking Member Jim Moran and Natural Resources Ranking Member Ed Markey.

"This is a bad bill-perhaps the worst Interior and Environment Appropriations bill I've seen in my 35 years of service on the Subcommittee. We are here today to tell you how bad it is and to say that it could get even worse during the floor consideration that begins today.

"The allocation that the Republican leadership gave this bill was exceedingly low... that's the root of the problem here. With a cut of 7 percent from 2011 which was already substantially lower than 2010. The result is a bill that will devastate the environment and materially harm our ongoing efforts to preserve America's natural heritage.

"It contains the lowest level of spending in the Land and Water Conservation Fund in more than 40 years.

"It cuts the EPA Budget to a level we have not seen in more than a decade. EPA was already cut by 16 percent in the current year. The Republican Majority is now proposing a further reduction in the agency's budget of 18 percent. That cannot and will not be good for the air we breathe and the water we drink and for all of the important functions of an agency whose stated mission is Environmental Protection.

"These EPA cuts will have downstream effects all across the nation: the vast majority of the agency's funds pass through to states and localities that are already squeezed by budget cuts. So there will be fewer infrastructure projects that create jobs in communities all across the country and provide one of the most basic services taxpayers expect: clean water. That's really tragic, when you reflect on the need. The Bush Administration's EPA Administrator estimated that there was a \$688 billion nationwide backlog of clean water infrastructure projects, and that

total is even larger today. That backlog is not going to disappear if we just ignore it, but the budget that the Republican leadership has given us pushes this problem farther down the road.

"As bad as these cuts are, the Republican leadership has also regrettably opened the door to a host of special interest riders on this bill. It is a veritable wish list of largely ideological authorizing provisions that will handcuff the EPA and the Department of the Interior. These riders have absolutely no impact on deficit reduction and most will be rejected by the Senate and the President. The bill as presented to the Subcommittee contained about two dozen of these objectionable provisions and it was made even worse when the Majority accepted several more of these special interest riders as amendments during Full Committee consideration. And it is entirely possible that we will see even more of these bad ideas proposed as amendments this week while we have the bill on the floor.

"One of these riders is language that would effectively block any funding to the Fish and Wildlife Service for new listing activities under the Endangered Species Act. As I did at Full Committee, I will be offering an amendment on the House Floor to remove these unwise prohibitions on the ESA and to maintain the force of law that has been in effect since President Nixon signed the Endangered Species Act in 1973.

"I also will be strongly supporting other amendments that aim to remove these riders. Among other amendments, we will attempt to strike language that allows new uranium mining near Grand Canyon National Park, because the people who depend on the Colorado River for drinking water should have this protection. Another amendment that I strongly support would increase funding for sanitation facilities for Native American communities.

"This is an uphill battle, but an important one. I am proud to join these Members-all of whom are among the strongest defenders of the environment in the House of Representatives-in expressing our strongest opposition to the legislation we have before us."

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