**DATE:**

**To: Editorial Boards and Writers**

**From: Haley McKey, 202-772-0247,** **hmckey@defenders.org** **(other organizations’ comms leads can go here)**

**RE: Final Defense Authorization Bill Must Be Free of Anti-Wildlife Riders**

The National Defense Authorization Act should authorize and set spending targets for military programs. But the two versions of the defense bills passed by the House and Senate both contain harmful, anti-wildlife riders irrelevant to legislation that must be passed every year to maintain military readiness and ensure national security. The defense bill is being used as a vehicle to attach extraneous and controversial ideological provisions that have nothing to do with defense.

**As the different House and Senate versions go to conference, wildlife conservation advocates are now** [calling](https://defenders.org/publications/gr/Please_Remove_NDAA_Riders_139%20Groups.pdf) **on House and Senate conferees to pass a clean version of the defense bill, free of extraneous environmental riders. The bill is a crucial piece of legislation that authorizes funding for the food, ammunition, fuel and lodging of the armed forces, and it must not be jeopardized by lawmakers trying to advance an anti-wildlife agenda. Passing a bill filled with riders would also set a dangerous precedent for members of Congress to add destructive and ideological language to future must-pass legislation. We ask that you use your editorial voice to call on your senators and representatives to pass a clean Defense bill free of these non-germane anti-wildlife provisions.**

**The anti-wildlife provisions in the defense bill would:**

* Interfere with science-based decision-making under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and put a 10-year block on protecting both the greater sage grouse and lesser prairie chicken while removing protections for the American burying beetle, despite growing threats to each of these species. This provision also threatens a cornerstone of our democracy by preventing the public from going to court to challenge these decisions.
* Significantly weaken a core provision of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) so that the military would only be required to undergo environmental review and permitting once every decade for the harm its training activities cause marine mammals. By doubling the duration of the military’s permits, this provision poses a serious risk to the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale and other marine mammal species.
* Recklessly green-light mining on critical public lands, exempting it from the environmental review and public engagement processes established by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), preventing local communities from having a voice in the process and potentially harming vulnerable wildlife.
* Take aim at our nation's public lands, allowing the Secretary of the Interior to transfer administrative jurisdiction of public land parcels up to 5,000 acres to military purposes without public input and eliminating the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as the requisite agency charged with ensuring that natural resource management plans for military installations do not adversely affect threatened or endangered species. Hundreds of thousands of acres of public taxpayer lands, including 800,000 acres of national wildlife refuge land in the Desert Refuge, would have their protections overridden.
* Authorize a land exchange between the Superior National Forest in Minnesota and the PolyMet Mining corporation so that the mining company can build an environmentally calamitous open pit copper mine on national forest lands.  This language would also circumvent the public’s right to access the courts.

The legislators who added these riders may claim that they are essential to military training and testing, but this is plainly false. For example, the lesser prairie-chicken does not inhabit most of the land that the House bill deems essential for military development, and the five-year MMPA permit review process already allows the Navy to conduct military exercises with sufficient flexibility and the ability to invoke a two-year national security exemption at any time. Many of these attempted rollbacks of wildlife protections would simply benefit oil, gas and other extractive industries while masquerading as military readiness provisions.

It’s clear: these anti-wildlife, anti-lands provisions are unrelated to military readiness and do not belong in the annual defense bill. Many of these provisions were removed from the defense bill in conference in previous years because conferees responsibly recognized this fact.

Committee leadership have indicated that they wish to finish the conference process by the end of July. We encourage you to editorialize in support of a clean defense bill and tell your senators and representatives to do all they can to remove these harmful riders in conference and protect wildlife, public lands and national security.

If you're interested in editorializing on this issue and want more information, please feel free to call Haley McKey at 202-772-0247, or send an email to hmckey@defenders.org.