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## Plan rips holes in a wildlife safety net

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PERSPECTIVE

Anyone from Wyoming who seeks removal of seasonal drilling stipulations has not only lost touch with what is important to the people of the state, but must not care much about wildlife. U.S. Rep. Richard Pombo's latest energy proposal, supported by Wyoming's Barbara Cubin, is what happens when decisions about energy development are made in places already deprived of wildlife.

Enjoying wildlife is fundamental to Wyoming-style recreation. Whether you're watching, hunting, photographing or fishing them, wild animals provide a vital, primal experience and are the main reason recreation-based tourists leave \$2 billion a year in our state. Wyoming's wildlife is diverse and abundant because of the unequaled landscape it inhabits. Our wide-ranging topography, from high alpine settings to lower deserts, provide distinctly different winter and summer ranges, which are connected by crucial migration paths. Our big game herds are adapted to endure Wyoming's harsh climate and landscape, but human-caused stress poses unnecessary threats to these animals' survival.

Seasonal stipulations, which restrict industrial activity in critical habitat, provide a window of protection during the harshest season. Our pronghorn, elk, mule deer, moose and other game animals enter winter with limited fat reserves. This vital bank account is drawn down throughout the coldest months, and never sees a deposit until the spring green up. If they consume too much energy fleeing a perceived threat, or resort to a less nutritious source of food, big game animals risk a fatal overdraft come March. Unrestricted winter drilling in our climate could mean the loss of thousands of animals.

Seasonal stipulations also protect landowners. If animals are forced off their normal range and on to private lands, they may get into haystacks, depleting food stores for livestock, and face additional hunting.

Oil and gas development will surely increase in Wyoming to meet our country's energy needs. Some natural gas operators have proposed alternatives to seasonal stipulations, in exchange for adopting measures that may reduce surface impacts to wildlife habitats, such as directional drilling multiple wells from a single pad and clustering pipelines, roads and related infrastructure. Consider these other tools in the tool box. In conjunction with other mitigation methods, these strategies may enable us to preserve our wildlife heritage for our children, while keeping energy's place in the Wyoming economy.

Seasonal stipulations have been used for more than 20 years and remain one of the best tools we have for wildlife protection. Abandoning them would be beyond irresponsible; it would leave us with no safety net to preserve a top reason to call Wyoming home.

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