



July 13, 2010

Dear Representative:

We are writing you to bring to your attention certain provisions of the CLEAR Act, H.R. 3534, which is scheduled for mark-up in the House Natural Resources Committee tomorrow.

Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, National Wildlife Federation, and The Wilderness Society support Title V of the Chairman's bill which would guide the development of a competitive commercial wind and solar leasing program on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the USDA Forest Service.

We believe that a competitive leasing program would help to ensure a fair and equitable return to taxpayers for the commercial use of public lands and provide greater security and certainty for project developers. Under the current rights-of-way system, project sites are determined on a first-come, first-served basis without any assurance that sites avoid will important landscapes, wildlife habitat, cultural and historic resources, and other environmental values. Likewise, the terms and conditions of rights-of-way may be altered by the Department of Interior at any time during the life of the project, adding a considerable degree of uncertainty to a developing industry.

While we support Title V as drafted, we believe that it should be strengthened to ensure a smooth transition to a competitive leasing program and to help accelerate the development of responsibly sited renewable energy projects on public lands. We believe that siting criteria that ensures that renewable projects avoid potential conflicts with wildlife, unique wildlands, and important natural resources and give priority to projects on mechanically disturbed or previously developed lands is critically important. This kind of foresight will help expedite renewable project development and create greater certainty for project developers, investors, as well as conservation advocates and the public. In addition, clear guidance is needed to ensure that environmental reviews are conducted in an efficient and effective manner and in full compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. Compliance with NEPA will ensure that the best alternatives are considered, all potential impacts are fully-known, and the public can have confidence that the government is proceeding in a transparent manner.

The Gulf oil spill brings into focus the need to accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy. President Obama has emphasized the need for this transition and renewable energy is a top priority for the Department. We cannot afford to let the conflict and delays that have characterized development of fossil energy define how we tap our abundant wind and solar resources on public lands. We must ensure that public lands projects are, as Secretary Salazar has stated, "smart from the start".

Title V of the CLEAR Act provides a good foundation for moving to a clean energy economy which could be improved with the recommendations we offer. We thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Defenders of Wildlife

National Wildlife Federation

Natural Resources Defense Council

The Wilderness Society