

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE OMNIBUS LANDS GRAB AND ENERGY RESTRICTIONS ACT

As families across the country struggling with their mortgages and uncertain financial conditions, the Senate is scheduled to spend the first few legislative days of 2009 debating a bill that not only ignores these problems, but may exacerbate them.

The Senate Majority Leader has announced plans to force the chamber to pass an omnibus package containing over 100 bills, exceeding 1,200 pages in length, increasing government spending by more than \$10 billion, prohibiting energy exploration on vast amounts of U.S. property, and adding even more restrictions for the use of millions of acres of federally managed lands.

Today, there are 708 federally imposed “wilderness areas” totaling 107 million acres of land in 44 states. If this bill is enacted, total federal wilderness acres will now exceed the amount of all developed land in the United States (108 million acres).



The bill also includes a number of provisions that benefit the parochial pet interests of a few members of Congress, including:

- \$5 million for the National Tropical Botanical Garden to operate and maintain gardens in Hawaii and Florida. The Garden currently has \$12.4 million in annual revenue, with operating expenses of \$8.1 million and net assets of \$59 million.

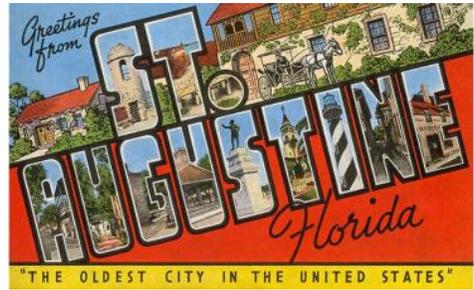


- A \$1 billion water project in California intended to settle a lawsuit with environmental groups. The minimum measurement of success outlined in the settlement is the restoration of 500 salmon.

- \$1 million annually for a five year Wolf Compensation and Prevention Program designed to assist property owners with non-lethal efforts to prevent predatory behavior by wolves and a compensation program for those losing livestock and other animals to wolves.



- \$3.5 million to celebrate the 450th Anniversary of St Augustine, Florida in 2015. The City of St. Augustine celebrates its birthday every year and “the celebration grows each year.” This year included three full days of special events and a birthday party complete with cake and games. The events commemorate St. Augustine’s standing as the longest continually inhabited city founded by Europeans in what is now the United States. The mayor expects that the total cost of the 450th celebration to exceed \$42 million.



- \$250,000 for the Park Service to study whether Alexander Hamilton’s boyhood estate at St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands is suitable for designation as a new National Park unit. Coincidentally the Trust for Public Land announced it would be buying the Estate the same week as the legislation passed the Energy Committee. In its announcement, the Trust said “will acquire it on behalf of the Virgin Islands and eventually, plans call for it to be protected by the National Park Service as a National Historic Site. ... The Trust is excited to be working with the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands and the National Park Service to preserve it.” In this case, taxpayers are being asked to foot the bill for a study located on a tropical resort island in what appears to be a prearranged deal between the Park Service and the National Trust.



- Several tourism related measures, including a couple that have already become a favorite piggy bank to pay for congressional earmarks, such as the Save America’s Treasures program, the Preserve America program, and the Route 66 Corridor Preservation program. The Route 66 program is currently restoring aging gas stations, motels and restaurants. Unfortunately, tourism has declined with many Americans unable to afford the cost of gas and, as evidenced by this bill, Congress’ misplaced priorities threaten to drive up the cost of travel.

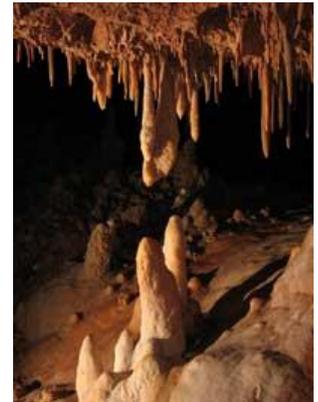


- A new ocean exploration program that is tasked with conducting “scientific voyages to locate, define, and document historic **shipwrecks**,” despite numerous private and public initiatives already dedicated to shipwreck research, including the U.S. Coast Guard, the Library of Congress, 12 private museums, and 8 libraries and historical societies.



- \$12 million for the Smithsonian to build new a greenhouse facility in Suitland, Maryland, to assist in the maintenance and preservation of the national orchid collection. The Smithsonian institute currently maintains several greenhouses, and has previously hosted special tours of their multiple greenhouse facilities.

- Removing the matching requirement for the National Cave and Karst Research Institute in New Mexico, in order to provide the Institute with unlimited federal funding. According to its website, the institute conducts cave educational programs and promotes national and international cave research. The cave institute has offered lectures such as “The Planet Within: Caves from New Mexico to Mars” and “Cave Crickets; Little ‘Cave Cows.’”



- The transfer of 1,800 acres of federal wilderness to the state of Alaska to build what some are calling a “road to nowhere.” The road through a national wildlife refuge would connect King Cove (population 756) to Cold Bay (population: less than 100 residents), so the residents of King Cove have access to the airport and medical facilities across the water in Cold Bay.



In 1998, Congress and the Clinton administration provided the city with \$37 million for a hovercraft to transport individuals for this same purpose. The road’s exact route has not been determined, but would require an estimated 17 miles of construction, at \$1 million to \$2 million per mile that is likely to be financed using money from the federal Highway Trust Fund.