

## A Wake Up Call! Stop the Bush Administration's Decimation of Environmental Laws!

*By Barbara McKasson, Conservation Chair*

With terrorism, Iraq and the economy grabbing most of the headlines, many people do not realize that President Bush, with the help of the Republican members of Congress, is quietly dismantling our basic federal environmental protections. Repeatedly, Bush is rewriting environmental regulations so that they afford less protection for our environment from pollution and destruction. Repeatedly, the Republican members of Congress are exempting federal agencies and private corporate actions from our fundamental environmental laws. The National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the integrity of all our environmental protections are at stake. We must let our federal elected officials know that this is totally unacceptable!

The Bush administration strategy has been to first announce some new method to make our environment cleaner, and then the turn around and weaken existing regulations or laws that roll back environmental regulations. For example, Bush's "Clear Skies Initiative" cancels out the "new source review" regulations that normally require new coal fired plant construction and significant renovations of existing industrial and power plants to install the newest technology to remove more pollutants. So, even though there is an epidemic of childhood asthma, the Bush administration is willing to let industry further degrade our air.

The Republican dominated Congress is no better than Bush. Environmentally unfriendly senators and representatives have been busy inserting language into agency reauthorization bills that allege to "streamline" environmental review. The effect of "streamlining" has been to 1) limit public input, 2) limit the public's right to appeal or sue an agency's decision, 3) limit the amount of environmental study required before approval of a project, and 4) even allow agencies and states to exempt projects from any environmental review at all! A prime example of this is the "Healthy Forests Initiative" that was just passed by Congress. This bill will allow the Forest Service to totally exempt certain timber sales from the requirements of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). Under the guise of protecting communities from forest fires, logging companies would be allowed to cut old growth trees in exchange for cutting some brush around homes that are close to a National Forest. The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are not required to consider any alternatives other than the 'proposed action alternative' if the project is located within 1.5 miles of a community. This cuts out the very heart of NEPA protections.

The list of attacks by the Bush administration on our fundamental environmental protections could go on and on. The House Energy Bill would exempt oil and gas activities from certain Clean Water Act requirements. The bill also includes a proposal to exempt the oil and gas industry from requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act, allowing them to inject diesel fuel and other harmful chemicals into the ground without regard for their impact on drinking water. The Federal Aviation Administration Bill, Transportation Bill, and many others have provisions that would shorten the environmental review period to 14 days, and even allow states to exempt many projects from environmental review.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Please call or write our two Illinois U.S. Senators and your U.S. Representative. Tell them that you oppose provisions in federal authorization bills that are weakening our environmental laws, especially NEPA. Urge them to support amendments to remove the language in these bills that would weaken our environmental review process, and also vote NO on the bills that still retain that language.

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