

WBR ARTICLE

Clean Water Act draws fire from West

By Staff

December 9, 2009 --

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Members of the House and Senate Western Caucuses have circled the wagons in response to the Clean Water Restoration Act (CWRA) (S. 787).

In a letter sent to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), 11 senators and 17 house members stated "In the West...there is overwhelming objection to this bill" due to concerns over job loss and regulatory overreach.

Their objections were so strong, that the senators and representatives said they "cannot imagine any bill so important that we could support it with the Clean Water Restoration Act attached."

According to a release from Sen. John Barrasso's office, the CWRA seeks to expand the jurisdictional sweep of the 1972 Clean Water Act by granting the federal government authority over all U.S. waterways by removing the requirement that the waterway be "navigable." The CWRA would make all inland waters subject to federal regulation, Barrasso said.

Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., and Rep. Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo., joined in signing the letter.

The letter further stated, "This legislation would grant the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers, virtually unlimited regulatory control over all wet areas within a state. This bill attempts to trump state's rights and pre-empts state and local governments from making local land and water use decisions."

The letter continued, this bill "will increase delays in securing permits and will slow or stop vital economic activities all across the country. Commercial and residential real estate development, agriculture, electric transmission, transportation and mining will all be effected. Thousands of jobs will be lost."

A statement from the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works had a different take on the bill, describing it as restoring "the Clean Water Act's protections for America's rivers, lakes and wetlands as they existed for 30 years prior to two recent Supreme Court rulings" while "maintaining longstanding protections for farmers, ranchers and wastewater systems."