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July 19, 2006

Jill Strait (Rep. McMorris) (202) 225-5006

Andrew Whelan (Resources Committee) (202) 226-9019

Resources Committee passes Endangered Species Compliance and Transparency Act

WASHINGTON - The House Resources Committee today voted 17-10 to support the *Endangered Species Compliance and Transparency Act*. This bipartisan legislation, sponsored by Rep. Cathy McMorris (R-Wash.), requires Power Marketing Administrations to list direct and indirect cost estimates associated with Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance.

"Today marks a victory for electricity ratepayers in the Pacific Northwest," **said McMorris**. "This bill is the first step in ensuring more transparency for our energy consumers. Most people are unaware that ESA related costs, such as salmon recovery, contribute to higher energy prices. Our goal is to foster better communication and collaboration so consumers have better access and understanding of information related to their energy rates."

"There is no more unpredictable regulatory cost to western electricity ratepayers than ESA compliance," **Resources Committee Chairman Richard W. Pombo (R-Calif.) said**. "Some folks may get their bill and say, 'A quarter of my bill to ESA costs is too much.' Others may say, 'It's not enough.' Either way, consumers deserve to know where their money is going. I thank Rep. McMorris for her steadfast leadership on this issue."

In the Pacific Northwest, communities depend on dams to provide low cost renewable power. Yet ESA costs related to endangered salmon have risen considerably over the last several years due to federal court-mandates and other compliance programs. In 2004, one mandated spill cost the federal government \$75 million in lost hydropower generation in the Pacific Northwest. Another spill this year helped make the Bonneville Power Administration the federal agency with the highest ESA compliance costs in the nation. These added costs are passed directly on to the consumer, whether the fish efforts they fund are cost-effective or not. According to the Washington Post, a 2004 mandated summer spill amounted to spending \$3.85 million for each Chinook salmon it saved.

The majority of consumers do not know the amount they pay for salmon recovery. In a May 2005 poll, Northwest River Partners found that more than 70 percent of ratepayers either do not know how much they pay or believe that less than 5 percent of their monthly bills go to salmon recovery in the Northwest. In addition, the group found that "almost six in ten (consumers) are not aware or do not believe that they pay higher rates to protect salmon."

The legislation has 21 co-sponsors and is supported by the American Farm Bureau, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, American Public Power Association, National Water Resources Association, Family Farm Alliance, and National Endangered Species Act Reform Coalition.