



Week ahead: GOP looks at 'modernizing' environmental laws

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Republicans on both sides of Capitol Hill will start looking into "modernizing" key, long-standing environmental laws.

GOP control of both chambers of Congress and the White House gives the party a unique opportunity to make lasting changes to laws like the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act, and to fix what Republicans think are wrong with the standards.

Democrats are likely to fight back at any changes and frame them as attacks at core environmental protections.

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee will kick off the process with a Wednesday hearing in the full committee on modernizing the Endangered Species Act.

The law, passed more than four decades ago, is meant to protect animal and plant species that are at risk, along with their habitats.

But the GOP has long complained that, especially under Democratic administrations, the species protections have been abused by activists, and the rights of property owners and other land users have been ignored.

The following day, on Thursday, the House Energy and Commerce Committee's environment subpanel will look at modernizing the environmental laws under its jurisdiction, including the Clean Air Act and the brownfields provisions of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act.

Rep. John Shimkus (R-Ill.), the panel's chairman, said in a statement that the hearing "will provide our members an opportunity to consider practical reforms to promote the expansion of domestic infrastructure and manufacturing."

Meanwhile, the White House is eager to get President Trump's remaining Cabinet nominees confirmed. While the Senate has not scheduled their votes, the chamber is likely to vote soon on Environmental Protection Agency nominee Scott Pruitt, Energy Department nominee Rick Perry and Interior Department nominee Ryan Zinke.

Elsewhere on Capitol Hill, two subcommittees of the House Science Committee will meet Wednesday to discuss the Energy Department's loan and loan guarantee program, a frequent subject of Republican criticism.

The hearing includes witnesses from the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute, both free-market think tanks that have slammed the program.

The next day, on Thursday, the full Science Committee will examine the "past, present and future" of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas) and other Republicans have been critical of NASA's climate change research and monitoring, a topic that is likely to come up at the hearing.