The Endangered Species Act: An Institutional Analysis

Arnav Kejriwal

Follow this and additional works at: http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/vol8_iss1

Recommended Citation
The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), referred to as the “crown jewel” of American environmental law, passed through Congress with nearly unanimous support. Within years, however, members of Congress were proposing to amend the Act and even eliminate it entirely, making the ESA one of the most controversial pieces of legislation of the 20th century. Past research, while informative, largely avoids discussion of the intricate relationships between voters, lobbyists, and politicians that were critical in the formation of the ESA. This project investigates the change in support for the ESA and the factors that contributed to its controversy. More generally, the work translates a typical historical narrative of the ESA into a formal institutional model that was first introduced by Olson (1995) and Sened (1997). This model, the Voter Proximity Model, suggests that policymakers vote on legislation with an intention of maximizing total expected votes for their re-election. A core implication is that lobbyists can influence a policymaker’s vote on a bill only if they have direct leverage over votes in that official’s re-election. These findings can help further question the motivations of politicians in negotiating public policy. The work is a basic, yet enlightening, step in understanding the Congressional process.