



As long as [everyone](#) is [getting into the act](#), we might as well also flag a critically important CA initiative for the environment that I imagine everyone else has missed: [Proposition 20, the "California Redistricting Initiative."](#)

I know — redistricting. You've fallen asleep already. You shouldn't. Here's the skinny:

In California, unlike in most other states, redistricting of state legislative seats is done not by the Legislature itself but rather by an [independent citizens' commission](#). We haven't actually seen how this thing will work yet, since it was created only a couple of years by [Proposition 11](#), which was — you guessed it — yet another initiative. Prop 20 would extend the commission's mandate, giving it authority over federal congressional seats as well.

Why is that a big deal? Simple: California is a Democratic state. Its Legislature has been Democratic for decades. The Senate hasn't been Republican for more than half a century. So in California, the Legislature tries to maximize Democratic districts, in the same way that Texas, another large state but which is Republican, tries to maximize seats for the GOP. (In Texas, it was worse, as disgraced and indicted former House Majority Leader, Tom Delay, got the Texas Legislature to redistrict mid-decade to increase Republican seats, an unprecedented step).

By taking redistricting power out of the hands of Democrats, Prop 20 would stand to reduce the number of Democratic congressmembers. And that would be really bad for the environment, because it could mean the difference between Democratic or Republican control of the House of Representatives. Example: when the Republicans last controlled Congress, the chair of the House Natural Resources Committee was [Richard Pombo](#), whose main initiatives were repealing the Endangered Species Act and selling one-quarter of the National Park System. Pombo lost in the Democratic wave of 2006, but he is back now, and stands to be elected to a very Republican district that includes Yosemite. ("Having Richard Pombo represent Yosemite," one wag noted, "is like having Godzilla represent Tokyo."). By contrast, the current Democratic chair of the committee is [Nick Rahall](#), who as a West Virginian won't make anyone forget John Muir, but has been a responsible and sensible steward of the nation's public lands.

Maybe you think that gerrymandering is terrible; I don't, but your mileage may vary. Unless congressional redistricting is done nationwide, however, "reforming" it only by cutting the number of Democrats could be very, very bad for the environment. If you don't believe me,

wait for Pombo to come back.