



Thursday, 19 December 2013

Mr. M. O'Brien
Science Correspondent, The News Hour
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Dear Mr. O'Brien

We are writing to you as three among several dozen scientists nationally who are concerned over the misuse of science to dilute the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for political ends. We are also concerned about intimidation of scientists within agencies and without.

We draw recent examples from gray wolf policy and attach a letter from the leadership of the American Society of Mammalogists to show that many nationally recognized scientists in addition to ourselves are concerned. But we can also connect you with scientists studying other endangered species such as polar bears or grizzly bears, and agency staff who have seen political appointees cherry-pick results and suppress science for political goals. Recent events rival the 2007 scandal around Julie MacDonald.

The catalyst for this letter is the imminent U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) removal of federal protections for gray wolves nationwide and our scientific and legal critique of that proposal soon to be published online on December 25th in the peer-reviewed, scientific journal Conservation Letters. In brief we show the USFWS (a) ignored >90 publications central to their premise and did so in violation of OMB and Executive Orders to use the best available science; (b) undermined Congressional intent and court precedents relating to the ESA, and (c) proposed an unscientific interpretation of the ESA's "significant portion of range" phrase, a move which drastically weakens the ESA for all endangered species.

Second, we are disturbed by the evidence on the PEER website (<http://www.peer.org/news/news-releases/2013/08/08/gray-wolf-peer-review-panel-purged-by-agency/>) about political influences on USFWS decisions, and the independent scientific review of their proposed rule. You no doubt read the national coverage of USFWS' attempt to unseat three renowned scientists who disagreed with their decision.

Third, the attached letter from the American Society of Mammalogists outlines how the FWS based a major part of their gray wolf proposal (designating a new species of wolf for the northeastern USA) on work published by 4 USFWS scientists without proper peer review or scientific rejoinder to their claims.

Concerned scientists like ourselves have begun to discuss the formation of independent review boards and institutional changes in how science is used in policy-making. We are speaking out because we believe the News Hour is one of the last best hopes for investigative journalism reaching a national audience.

Yours sincerely,

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