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1ST DISTRICT, WASHINGTON



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TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE INTERNET
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
ENVIRONMENT AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4701
Oct. 30, 2006

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Mr. Earl E. Devaney, Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Devaney:

It has recently come to my attention that politically appointed employees at the Department of Interior have been altering findings and reports submitted by scientists in the field. These reports assert that documents were altered and resulted in direct contradiction to scientific findings by agency biologists. Specifically, Deputy Assistant Secretary Julie MacDonald, has been accused of editing Fish and Wildlife Service documents. The effect of these edits was to block the consideration of certain species for listing under the Endangered Species Act. I am writing to request that your office investigate the actions of an Interior Department official immediately.

Unfortunately, the practice of undermining scientific findings seems to be a recurring problem within the Bush Administration. This type of political interference in science is of great concern to Congress because it undermines the integrity of the public policy making process and has a chilling effect on the scientific candor necessary to inform the best policy decisions. This very agency had a recent run-in with Oregon State University (OSU) student, Daniel Donato, when his findings after lengthy scientific research found that the Bush Administration's position on the necessity of salvage logging was not the most effective treatment for all damaged forestry systems. Instead of looking at the scientific findings the administration's policy blatantly favored developers at the expense of tax payers. The Interior Department erroneously withheld funds for the Donato study after it reviewed the findings as a clear form of retribution. Thankfully, after great urging from the academic community and members of Congress, the Department of Interior eventually restored the funds to OSU.

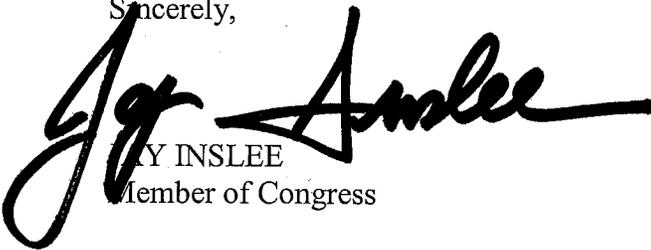
As you know, the listing process of the Endangered Species Act requires the Fish and Wildlife Service to base decisions upon the best available science. In responding to a petition to list a species in a 90-day finding, the agency must decide whether listing may be warranted based on the scientific information presented. The agency's subsequent decision whether to list the species, likewise, must be made "solely on the basis of the best scientific data available."

The attached article documents several instances in which Assistant Deputy Secretary MacDonald appears to have reversed, distorted, or tampered with scientific determinations on the status of species proposed for listing as threatened or endangered, contrary to the clear legal requirement. In each of these cases, MacDonald's interference resulted in changing a "positive" finding – in favor of considering listing and thus providing greater protections to a species – to a "negative" finding. In making these changes, Ms. MacDonald, who has no training as a biologist, overrode the recommendations of agency biologists.

I respectfully request that your office investigate these and any other actions taken by or under the authority of Julie MacDonald that may have compromised the scientific integrity of the endangered species listing process

The atmosphere within the Department of Interior appears to be one based on political priorities and coercion. It is my hope that throughout this investigation you examine whether these abuses of science are part of a systemic or more widespread problem at the Interior Department. Finally, I request that you make recommendations about how best to improve scientific integrity at the agency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Inslee". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

JAY INSLEE
Member of Congress