



Union of Concerned Scientists
Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions

**Oral Testimony of Francesca T. Grifo, Ph.D.
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Before the Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Hearing on “Endangered Species Act Implementation: Politics or
Science?”
May 9, 2007**

Good morning, my name is Dr. Francesca Grifo. I am a Senior Scientist and the Director of the Scientific Integrity Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, a leading science-based nonprofit working for a healthy environment and a safer world. Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak to you this morning about the problem of political interference in the work of federal scientists.

In March 2006, almost 6000 biologists wrote a letter asking Congress to protect the integrity of science in the implementation of the Endangered Species Act. One of the Act’s great strengths is its foundation in sound scientific principles and its reliance on the best available science. The biologists urged

- that “objective scientific information and methods” be used in listing species,
- that the habitat needs of endangered species are “scientifically well-informed” and
- that the Endangered Species Act standard of “best available science” must rely on “impartial scientific experts.”

Losing species means losing the potential to solve some of humanity’s most intractable problems, including hunger and disease. The Endangered Species Act is more than just a law – it is the ultimate safety net in our life support system.

Unfortunately, time and time again, when science has conflicted with political goals, Americans lose and politics wins. At the Fish and Wildlife Service, science itself is endangered.

More than 12,000 scientists, including 52 Nobel laureates, have signed a scientists’ statement condemning political interference in science. UCS has compiled over seventy examples of the misuse of science in its *A to Z Guide to Political Interference in Science*.

In 2005, in an attempt to assess the state of science at the Fish and Wildlife Service, UCS and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) surveyed more than 1,400 FWS scientists.

Agency scientists reported that pressure to alter scientific reports for political reasons has become pervasive. At field offices around the country, Fish and Wildlife scientists tell of being

asked to change scientific information, remove scientific facts or come to conclusions that are not supported by the science.

- More than half of all respondents (56 percent) knew of cases where “commercial interests have inappropriately induced the reversal or withdrawal of scientific conclusions or decisions through political intervention;” and
- More than two out of three staff scientists (70 percent) and nearly nine out of 10 scientist managers (89 percent) knew of cases “where U.S. Department of Interior political appointees have injected themselves into Ecological Services determinations.”
- More than four out of five (85 percent) said that funding to implement the Endangered Species Act is inadequate.

One scientist noted that “I have been through the reversal of two listing decisions due to political pressure. Science was ignored—and worse manipulated to build a bogus rationale for reversal of these listing decisions.”

Another remarked that, “DOI officials have forced changes in Service documents, and worse, they have forced upper-level managers to say things that are incorrect...,” while a third wondered “Why can’t we be honest when science points in one direction but political reality results in making a decision to do otherwise? Morale and credibility will improve if we are honest rather than trying to twist science to make politicians happy.”

These survey results illustrate an alarming disregard for scientific facts among the political appointees entrusted to protect threatened and endangered species.

There is evidence of politics trumping science in the listing of the **Greater Sage Grouse, Gunnison Sage Grouse, Gunnison’s Prairie Dog, Roundtail Chub, *Tabernaemontana rotensis*, Trumpeter Swan, and the White Tailed Prairie Dog.**

Politics won in the critical habitat designation of the **Bull Trout, Florida Panther, Marbled Murrelet, Palid Sturgeon, Piping Plover, Interior Least Tern, Red Frog, and Salmon and Steelhead.**

Solutions

The Union of Concerned Scientists urges this committee to enact reforms:

Transparency in Scientific Decisions

- To ensure the work of federal scientists will not be subject to political manipulation, the Department of Interior should increase transparency in the decision-making process to expose manipulation of science and make other political appointees think twice before altering or distorting scientific documents.

Scientific Communication

Open communication among scientists is one of the pillars of the scientific method.

- Department of Interior scientists should be free to disseminate their research results.

- They should adopt media and communication policies that ensure tax-payer funded scientific research is accessible to Congress, the media, and the public. Scientists should be proactively made aware of these rights.

Whistleblower Rights

- I want to thank the House for approving the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act. It is time for the Senate to act.

Immediate Actions

Finally there are three immediate actions:

- Secretary Kempthorne should send a clear message to all political appointees that substituting opinions for science is unacceptable.
- In light of the demonstrated pervasiveness of political interference in Endangered Species Act decisions during the past several years, the Interior Department should engage in a systematic review of all Bush administration decisions to ensure that the science behind those decisions was not altered or distorted. At the very least, Secretary Kempthorne should require an immediate reevaluation of decisions where political interference has been exposed.
- Given the number of recent attempts to undermine the Endangered Species Act science by members of Congress and political appointees, congressional committees of jurisdiction must act to safeguard the role of science in protecting highly imperiled species.

We look forward to working with the 110th Congress on bipartisan legislation and other reforms to restore scientific integrity to federal policymaking.