

# Fish & Wildlife Reopens Endangered Species Listings

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Reporting by Roddy Scheer



The **Center for Biological Diversity** calls last year's decision to reduce habitat for the endangered red-legged frog (pictured) a "giveaway to the development industry."

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Environmentalists declared a pyrrhic victory last week when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that it would revisit eight cases of Endangered Species Act listing decisions in light of evidence that disgraced former Interior Department official Julie MacDonald exerted "inappropriate influence" over the science behind them.

MacDonald served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Wildlife and Parks from 2002 until last May, when she stepped down after an internal review found that she had violated federal rules by giving government documents to industry lobbyists. A political appointee with no relevant scientific background, MacDonald stands accused of bullying scientists and personally rewriting scientific documents to prevent the protection of imperiled species.

But environmentalists contend that the eight cases under review are just a few of the instances in which sound science was overruled in favor of the Bush administration's political line. Upwards of 200 species and habitat rulings crossed MacDonald's desk during her five years at the Interior Department.

Francesca Grifo of the nonprofit Union of Concerned Scientists questions the validity of the decision-making process on up to two dozen endangered species listing cases made while MacDonald was in office. She cites the case of the bull trout, in which an economic analysis was distorted and censored, and that of the marbled murrelet, when officials overruled the recommendations of Fish and Wildlife scientists. Meanwhile, the **Center for Biological Diversity**, another leading nonprofit on endangered species issues, calls last year's decision to reduce habitat for the endangered red-legged frog a "giveaway to the development industry" and considers the new review announcement too little too late.

"While we welcome revisiting decisions where political interference has been documented, the list of species under consideration is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive," says Grifo. "The

Interior Department should engage in a systematic review of all Bush Administration decisions—not just those where interference has been exposed—to ensure that the science behind those decisions was not altered or distorted.”

For its part, the Fish and Wildlife Service has not ruled out looking into more decisions if new evidence comes to light about tampering with science. “We have acted to correct problems,” says Dale Hall, the agency’s director. “Should our reviews indicate that additional corrective actions are necessary, we will take appropriate action as quickly as we can.”

Source: [UCSUSA News](#), [Record Net](#)