

ENDANGERED ETHICS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW) will reconsider eight decisions involving endangered species. The decisions were "inappropriately influenced" by a political appointee — former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks Julie A. MacDonald.

USFW Director H. Dale Hall said he hopes the "blemish on the scientific integrity" of the agency will be rectified by the reviews.

The list includes the white-tailed prairie dog, Preble's meadow jumping mouse, arroyo toad, southwestern willow flycatcher, California red-legged frog, Canada lynx and 12 species of Hawaiian picture-wing flies.

At the last minute USFW pulled the marbled murrelet seabird that is found along Oregon's coast from the list.

According to Hall, the regional listing of the murrelet as well as a decision on bull trout habitat were removed from review because MacDonald's impact on those decisions had been within her "legitimate purview," minimal, or related to law or policy.

MacDonald resigned from her position in May after the department's inspector general found that she had broken federal rules. She is accused of browbeating federal scientists and improperly leaking information about endangered species to private groups.

"Despite no scientific training, MacDonald interfered in dozens of scientific decisions concerning endangered species," said Noah Greenwald, a conservation biologist in Portland.

The review "falls far short of what is needed to redress MacDonald's role in weakening protection of the nation's endangered species," according to Greenwald's group, the Center for Biological Diversity.

"Although we are glad these species will receive consideration for additional protection, the list of decisions to be reconsidered is outrageously incomplete," the center said, and called for more species to be reconsidered.

One of the officials charged with reviewing the ethics issues raised in the report on MacDonald, Assistant Secretary for Water and Science Mark Limbaugh, has since resigned to take a job with the Ferguson Group. He will work as a lobbyist representing local and state water agencies with interests before the Interior Department, the Army Corps of Engineers and Congress.

In a July 20 letter, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., asked Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne to clarify how his department will ensure its accountability and ethics in the after MacDonald's "scandal" and Limbaugh's new position as a lobbyist. —
Camilla Mortensen