

Ex-official's species decisions questioned

By [Staff and wire reports](#)

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Federal officials are investigating whether a former high-ranking U.S. Fish and Wildlife official improperly reduced protections for the California red-legged frog and seven other species, officials said Friday.

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary Julie MacDonald resigned in May after the department's inspector general rebuked her for pressuring scientists to alter findings about endangered species, then leaking information to outside parties.

Last year, Fish and Wildlife designated 450,000 acres of critical habitat for the red-legged frog, just 11 percent of the original proposal. The decision drew criticism from environmental groups that said the habitat was far too small to protect the frog, which is believed to have inspired Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County."

More than 200 species and habitat rules came to MacDonald's desk from 2002 until her departure earlier this year. In most cases, MacDonald's involvement did not lead to inappropriate changes, Fish and Wildlife said in a statement Friday.

"We have acted to correct problems," said Fish and Wildlife Director H. Dale Hall. "Should our reviews indicate that additional corrective actions are necessary, we will take appropriate action as quickly as we can."

The San Francisco-based Center for Biological Diversity called last year's red-legged frog habitat reduction a "giveaway to the development industry" and said Friday's announcement came too late.

The group called for a full and transparent accounting of all of MacDonald's decisions.