

A-OK!

This Species Is ~~in~~ Danger

A Bush bureaucrat hurries critters to the grave

Which is deadliest to endangered creatures: (a) a developer with a bulldozer, (b) a logger with a chainsaw, (c) a trophy hunter with a rifle, or (d) a determined editor with a blue pencil?

Julie MacDonald seals the case for (d). As deputy assistant secretary in the Department of the Interior (a political appointment), she has the authority to shape the evidence for listing species as "threatened" or "endangered." Documents obtained

by [the Center for Biological Diversity](#) show that she has repeatedly disregarded the recommendations of career scientists, even changing their findings to reverse their conclusions. This may help explain why the Bush administration has listed fewer species than any other. Failure to obtain listing can be the kiss of death; 79 percent of the plants and animals that have gone extinct since the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was passed in 1973 were *not* listed. Here's MacDonald's MO:

GUNNISON'S PRAIRIE DOG

This prairie dog's habitat in the Four Corners area of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah has been reduced by more than 97 percent. Other threats include oil and gas drilling, poisoning

by ranchers, and sylvatic plague. In January 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommended that the prairie dog be listed as an endangered species. Then MacDonald intervened.



Chris Nolin/ARL/R9/FWS/DOI

01/19/2006 12:06 PM

To "Kurt Johnson" <kurt_johnson@fws.gov>

cc "Marjorie Nelson" <Marjorie_Nelson@fws.gov>, Adam Zerrenner/ARL/R9/FWS/DOI@FWS

Subject Gunnison pd

Per Julie please make the pd finding negative

Thanks

Above, Chris Nolin, another political appointee at Interior, relays MacDonald's directions on the prairie dog ("pd"). Accord-

ingly, the original finding that plague was a threat morphed into one that it wasn't. Here's what scientists said at first:

We have determined that substantial information is presented in the petition and available in our files to indicate that sylvatic plague may threaten the Gunnison's prairie dog such that listing may be warranted.

And here's what they said after MacDonald's intervention:

We have determined that information in the petition and readily available in our files does not constitute substantial scientific information that disease or predation are threats to Gunnison's prairie dog such that listing under the Act may be warranted.

GUNNISON SAGE GROUSE

Only about 4,000 Gunnison sage grouse survive in eight isolated populations in Colorado and Utah. Last summer, the Fish and Wildlife Service was intent on listing the species as "endangered" and had even prepared press releases announcing

the decision. Then MacDonald went into action. First she ("JM4") disputed that the Gunnison was a separate species from the greater sage grouse:

(Schroeder et al. 2004),

Gunnison sage-grouse and greater sage-grouse have similar life histories

Deleted: are different genetically, morphologically, and behaviorally, their

Comment [JM4]: I think this document makes a good case for the Gunnison not being threatened, but I also think it is important to highlight the serious flaws in the designation of the Gunnison as a separate species. That can be done at the end of the finding, and is not essential, but I do think it's important.

This didn't sit well with Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, one of whom complained about MacDonald's armchair taxonomy

(her training is in civil engineering, not biology) of the bird ("GUSG"):

The species designation issue is one that should NOT be questioned. We have not been provided any science that disputes GUSG species designation.

Contrary to the recommendations of agency scientists and staff, the Fish and Wildlife Service declined to list the grouse.

"ERASE ALL THOSE BACK E-MAILS"

In a 2005 survey of Fish and Wildlife Service scientists, many criticized MacDonald for using her political interference to "subvert, spin, or even illegitimize our findings," as one put it. Now Representative Nick Rahall (D-W.Va.), the new chair of the

House Natural Resources Committee, is promising an investigation. One intriguing avenue is this e-mail from Steven Quarles, a prominent anti-ESA attorney for a wide variety of industry groups, sent to MacDonald's administrative assistant:

Here's the message I couldn't deliver to Julie. I'd tell her to just go in and erase all those back emails but I must admit I suspect some of them are mine...and, of course, THEY are critically important.

Steven P. Quarles
Crowell & Moring LLP
1001 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

We don't know why Quarles would want certain e-mails deleted. We do know that he represented an industry group opposing listing of the California tiger salamander and that in support of his position, MacDonald overruled staff economists

as well as scientists. The Center for Biological Diversity suspects that not all e-mails between MacDonald and Quarles have been turned over and is pressing for further disclosures. Stay tuned.