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Editor
Audubon Magazine
700 Broadway
New York, NY 10003

Dear Editor:

Ted Williams' article in the May 2002 issue entitled "Lynx, Lies, and Media Hype" attempts to describe the furor over the issue of biologists submitting unauthorized samples to the National Lynx Survey. He is correct about the misinformation and misinterpretation of impacts that resulted as the story hit the media. Unfortunately, in his zeal to point these out, Williams perpetuates almost as much misinformation as that which he condemns. Because we believe Audubon members are committed to constructive conservation action, we'd like members to consider the following.

The unauthorized samples submitted to the National Lynx Survey damaged the credibility and the integrity of federal and state agencies as science-based organizations. Regardless of what the biologists say were their motives, their actions were unprofessional and outside the scientific protocols established for the survey. Therefore, support for their wrongful and unjustified actions also damages the integrity of scientific research.

The biologists were NOT justified in initiating their own independent tests of the laboratory in Missoula, Montana, that analyzed the DNA samples. Furthermore, their supervisors did not have the authority to override the scientific protocols of the survey. All displayed a lack of professional behavior and knowledge of ethical conduct, as well as a lack of understanding of the scientific process.

The scientific protocols were rigorous for both the Missoula lab and for field sampling. Because blind samples had already been used to set up the Missoula lab, in conjunction with the Fish and Wildlife Service forensics lab in Ashland, Oregon, no control samples or blind samples were needed to test the lab's ability to identify species. In addition, internal controls were run with each sample analyzed. For these reasons, the scientific protocols for the National Lynx Survey did not need nor did they authorize the submission of blind or control samples. These protocols were explained to all who collected hair samples, including these biologists. They or anyone else could have asked questions or stated concerns at any time with the survey coordinator or the lab manager.

There have been four separate investigations on this issue – one Forest Service investigation, two Department Inspector General investigations (Department of Agriculture and Department of the



Interior), and one by the General Accounting Office. All came to the same conclusion, which is that the biologists knowingly submitted unauthorized hair samples to the laboratory.

Because of the biologists' actions, we have spent months answering questions and providing the facts to investigators, Congress, the media, and to the public. We have provided numerous briefings with Congressional Committee staff members of both parties. We have testified before Congress. We have also made positive changes within our organization. We applied the Code of Scientific Ethics to all Forest Service employees, not just our research scientists. We are placing more emphasis on explaining the often-complex relationships in the use of science in land and resource management.

As small as the actions of the biologists may seem, their actions have caused a continuing storm regarding scientific procedures and information, endangered species, and land management decisions.

We invite *Audubon* readers and others to visit our website for more information about the lynx issue (www.fs.fed.us/rl). Look for the Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment, which has many items related to lynx. Click on "Links" to view testimonies presented before the House Committee on Resources. We also provide a more detailed rebuttal to the Williams article.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert Lewis, Jr.
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Deputy Chief for Research & Development

/s/ Tom L. Thompson
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