

Statement of Mark Rey
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United States Department of Agriculture

Before the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Concerning the Natural Lynx Survey
March 6, 2002

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today along with Mr. Tom Thompson, Deputy Chief for National Forest Systems of the Forest Service and Dr. Kevin McKelvey, Research Scientist at the Forest Service's, Rocky Mountain Research Station. Dr. McKelvey will also offer testimony on a later panel.

I would like to defer to Mr. Thompson to review the circumstances that bring us here today. Then I will offer a few brief, concluding remarks so as to not unnecessarily delay the expected horsewhipping. Mr. Thompson, Dr. McKelvey, and I will be available to respond to questions.

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The events described by Mr. Thompson have engendered considerable consternation. They present us with specific management challenges that we will meet. More broadly, however, they raise two serious questions which go beyond the facts of this particular event.

First, the events described by Mr. Thompson achieved such resonance because they apparently ratify a suspicion held by some about the use of scientific information in resources decision-making -- that is, information is manipulated under the guise of dispassionate expertise to achieve desired, or even predetermined, outcomes. This did not occur in this instance, but the rush to judgment that it did should serve as a warning signal to us.

Second, these events highlight a myth that has grown up in the midst of natural resources decision-making. The myth is that “good science” can, by itself, somehow make difficult natural resource decisions for us, and relieve us of the necessity to engage in the hard work of democratic deliberations that must finally shoulder the weight of those decisions.

In the case of endangered species issues, this myth has been, in my opinion, carried to an extreme. There is a perception that a limited number of people, with similar or identical expertise, and without much outside scrutiny, use sometimes extremely limited scientific data -- even though they may be the best data available -- to render decisions. These decisions trigger legally automatic results that, increasingly, have sweeping social and economic impacts.

It would be counterproductive to dwell on the facts of this specific case without trying to learn how to use science more wisely in the complex political milieu that surrounds issues like endangered species recovery. Rather than meeting out punishment, the broader management challenge is to enlist biologists as partners in developing policy and gaining congressional and public support for federal land management decisions.

A second challenge is one that we must share -- that is, to review and streamline the entire natural resources decision-making process, with scientific accuracy, accountability, accessibility, trust-building, and efficiency as our goals. This will also give higher value to the knowledge of scientists as we apply their expertise in real-time decisions.

These are problems that the Chief of the Forest Service and I have acknowledged before this committee, and are committed to working with the committee to resolve.

Thank you.