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Lynx fur in forests to be investigated

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers want an investigation into whether government wildlife biologists planted lynx fur in two national forests to make it appear the animals were there so people would be kept out.

The Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service are tracking the rare Canadian lynx to determine how many there are and where they live. Data from the four-year survey will be used to determine how best to protect the lynx, which is classified as "threatened."

During the 2000 sampling session, biologists planted three samples of lynx fur on rubbing posts in parts of the Wenatchee and Gifford Pinchot national forests in Washington state, areas not normally home to the lynx. Fur taken from the posts is used to indicate if the wildcats have been in the area.

The seven biologists — three from the Forest Service employees, two from the Fish and Wildlife Service and two from the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife — admitted they planted the samples to test whether the lab could accurately identify the lynx fur.

The cats, 3 1/2 feet long and 40 pounds at their largest, have brownish-gray fur, black-tufted ears and prey on snowshoe hares. Efforts to protect lynx habitats are under way in 57 forests in 16 states.

None of the seven biologists remain in the lynx survey program. Six were reassigned and one retired.

House Resources Committee Chairman James Hansen, R-Utah, and Rep. Scott McInnis, R-Colo., chairman of the House forests subcommittee, called that "grossly inadequate punishment given the magnitude of this offense."

They said if it is found that the intent was to skew the study, the biologists should be fired.

"These offenses minimally amount to professional malfeasance of the highest order," they wrote Tuesday in a letter to Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman and Interior Secretary Gale Norton, whose agencies administer the lynx program.

Some proposed changes to protect the lynx include limiting the thinning of forests to improve the habitat for the snowshoe hares and to restrict snowmobiling and some other winter activities.

Lynx hoax perpetrators receive government bonuses

Scientists employed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service knowingly submitted falsely labeled samples of lynx fur in a survey of lynx populations in two Washington state national forests.

- The General Accounting

Office has issued a report saying the scientists knew they should not have done so and some supervisors were aware of what was happening, but took no action.

- Some members of Congress are convinced they did so in order to rig the study so as to restrict

recreational activities on public lands.

- The lynx is listed as an endangered species.

Residents of wilderness areas in some Western states have long contended that researchers in various federal agencies have been introducing false evidence in order to skew their findings — and lock the public out of national forests on the grounds of potential harm to endangered species.

The names of four federal biologists who participated in the scheme were included in the GAO report. Although they were initially reprimanded for their actions, they later received government bonuses for their work.

When asked why supervisors who were aware of the ploy did not take action to halt the false sample submissions, Congressman Scott McInnis (R-Colo.), chairman of the Resources Committee subcommittee on forests and forest health, replied "they did take action; they gave them bonuses."

SOURCE: Audrey Hudson, "GAO: Lynx Fur Hoax Was Widely Known," Washington Times, March 7, 2002; Ronald Maffi (acting managing director for special investigations), "Canada Lynx Study: Unauthorized Hair Samples Submitted for Analysis," Testimony before the House Committee on Resources, GAO-02-496T, March 6, 2002.

They lied about the owl data too

Hot on the heels of the scandal involving the falsification of government "scientific" reports on lynx populations in the Northwest comes evidence that U.S. Forest Service officials knowingly used false data on spotted owl habitats to block logging in a California forest. The revelation comes from court documents obtained by the *Washington Times*.

• The agency did not have a "rational basis" for halting a timber sale, according to the previously undisclosed ruling of Federal Claims Court Judge Lawrence S. Margolis, who called the action "arbitrary" and "capricious."

• This revelation of junk science follows other questionable actions taken by federal officials in the name of protecting endangered species.

• In addition to false samples in the lynx survey and falsified data on spotted owl habitats,

faulty information was uncovered in a study of endangered fish species — and used as justification to deny water to farmers in several states.

• The federal government has already had to pay out \$15 million to more than 30 lumber companies in compensation for falsifying spotted owl data, which led to canceled timber sales.

In addition, the federal government agreed recently to pay one company another \$9.5 million for canceling four sales — a cancellation the judge found to be "arbitrary, capricious and without rational basis."

He also found that the officials knew their findings were faulty at the time they ordered the sales canceled.

One so-called spotted owl expert, Gerry Verner, testified that after driving through vast swaths of forests, it was his "gestalt notion" that there were spotted owls around — although he never saw any.

SOURCE: Audrey Hudson, "Owl Data Knowingly Faulty," Washington Times, March 14, 2002.

Editorials...

Hard evidence refutes 'spotted owl' contentions

Evidence has been presented to demonstrate that the "spotted owl" campaign being waged to interdict the U.S. timber industry is as bogus as any of the spurious outrages committed earlier by ecology nuts bent on delivering harm to American citizens.

The pitch has been that a spotted owl won't live anywhere except in an "old growth forest," and this peculiarity is said to mean that federal coercion must be applied to halt the cutting of trees that are mature and ready to be harvested.

All this expansion of government, encroachment against individual freedom and expropriation of private property and wealth is to be done on the pretext of protecting spotted owls and based upon the contention that spotted owls will die unless old growth forests are preserved in extravagant abundance.

An Associated Press account circulated during the past weekend, however, presented hard evidence that this fundamental contention about spotted owls is false. AP writer David Foster reported from California that Lowell Diller, a biologist employed by Simpson Timber Company, demonstrated for reporters and 17 biologists employed by the California Department of Fish and Game spotted owls are common and thriving on forest land owned by his company.

"We have owls practically everywhere," Diller declared as he took the group on a tour of the company's 400,000 acres of timber land. He backed up his prediction by imitating the call of the spotted owl as he travelled through the forest. Foster reported that in a matter of a few hours Diller "had summoned eight spotted owls for inspection, and the state biologists were impressed. Diller's methods were solid, his findings well documented, they said."

Foster related, "Nobody would mistake Simpson's industrial timber land for the kind of forest wilderness that environmentalists want set aside for owls. The company started logging giant old redwoods here at the turn of the century and now is clear-cutting a second generation of trees.

"But spotted owls seem to thrive here. Diller has banded more than 125 owls since March. He estimates there is a nesting pair of owls per 1,000 acres, one of the highest densities ever reported. The birds nest in trees as young as 30 years old... Rather than avoid clear-cuts, many nest in patches of trees near them, perhaps to hunt the abundant wood rats, Diller said."

Foster also reported the state biologists chose to ignore the plain facts Diller had showed to them. He wrote, "To Simpson Timber's chagrin, the state biologists remained firm in their belief that, over most of its range, the owl depends on 'old-growth' forest."

In this way, the bureaucrats from the California Department of Fish and Game revealed that the 'spotted-owl caper is just as phony as was the snail-darter escapade. The ecology nuts don't care about the facts; they just want to spread grief among American citizens on whatever pretense they might be able to fabricate.