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U.S. Agency May Reverse 8 Decisions on Wildlife

By JOHN M. BRODER
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WASHINGTON, July 20 — The [Interior Department](#) said Friday that it would review and probably overturn eight decisions on wildlife and land-use issues made by a senior political appointee who has been found to have improperly favored industry and landowners over agency scientists.

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The appointee, Julie A. MacDonald, resigned on May 1 as a deputy assistant

secretary for fish and wildlife and parks, after an internal review found that she had violated federal rules by giving government documents to lobbyists for industry. The agency's inspector general also found several instances in which Ms. MacDonald browbeat department biologists and habitat specialists and overruled their recommendations to protect a variety of rare and threatened species.

H. Dale Hall, the director of the [Fish and Wildlife Service](#), said he had asked the agency's regional managers to submit for review cases in which Ms. MacDonald might have inappropriately bent the process to fit her political agenda. Mr. Hall winnowed the list to eight instances in which he said he expected that her actions would be reversed.

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The arroyo toad may benefit when the Interior Department reviews a former official's decisions.

“We wouldn’t be doing them if we didn’t suspect the decision would be different,” Mr. Hall said in a telephone conference with journalists. “It’s a blemish on the scientific integrity of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of the Interior.”

The species that could receive additional protection are the white-tailed prairie dog, Preble’s meadow jumping mouse, 12 species of Hawaiian picture-wing flies, the arroyo toad, the Southwestern willow flycatcher, the California red-legged frog and the Canada lynx. The extent of Rocky Mountain habitat protection for the jumping mouse is also under review.

Ms. MacDonald did not return a call seeking comment.

Ms. MacDonald’s actions had sparked an outcry among agency biologists and environmental advocates and led to a series of hearings in Congress on whether the Bush administration was politicizing science.

Representative Nick J. Rahall II, Democrat of West Virginia and chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources, said he was pleased that the agency was taking steps to address what he called political meddling in decisions that should be based on impartial scientific study.

“I am heartened to hear that the Department of the Interior is stepping up to the plate to beginning address the ‘politics trumps science’ ploy endemic throughout this administration,” Mr. Rahall said. “What we have learned to date raises concerns about

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political tinkering with science that has affected many endangered-species-related decisions — and goodness knows what else — that deserve further scrutiny.”

The conflict between science and political ideology has been a recurrent theme in Washington in recent years, with complaints arising from inside and outside the administration about decisions on oil exploration, timber rights, [global warming](#) and public health. Just last week, the former surgeon general [Richard H. Carmona](#) said top Bush administration officials had repeatedly tried to water down or suppress important public health reports for political considerations.

Environmental advocates said numerous cases of potential political interference by Ms. MacDonald or others in the department were left off the list of decisions to be reviewed. They cited as examples decisions affecting the status of the marbled murrelet, a small sea bird found in the Pacific Northwest; a plan to help speed the spotted owl’s recovery; and the habitat of the bull trout.

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