

**Statement of Congressman Doc Hastings
House Committee on Resources
Oversight Hearing on Canada Lynx Interagency National Survey and
Endangered Species Data Collection
March 6, 2002**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for holding this hearing today and for allowing me the opportunity to speak.

Time and time again westerners and rural Americans have been forced to shoulder the burden of land policies based on questionable science. Unfortunately, today's hearing isn't even about questionable science, it's about an allegation of outright fraud.

The scandal involving the actions of seven Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees studying the Canadian Lynx in North Central Washington illustrates the sad fact that amid claims of scientific integrity in federal agencies—reliable evidence and sound scientific practices are at times abandoned for the personal agendas of agency personnel.

This scandal shows a notable absence of checks to ensure that only sound science shapes policy, and it brings to light the ease by which federal agencies can make decisions based on assumptions rather than hard scientific evidence.

It is no surprise that the trust Central Washington's communities have for federal agencies and their employees has been steadily eroding for many years. And considering that the Wenatchee and Gifford Pinchot National Forests literally *are* the back yards of many whom I represent it no surprise that this trust just took a dramatic turn for the worse.

A decade after the designation of the Spotted Owl habitat resulted in the end of harvesting from many forest lands in Washington, we have come to learn that much about the species is still unknown—including what habitat it prefers. Unfortunately the decision to seal off massive tracts of valuable land devastated near by communities and cost thousands of jobs. The agencies appeared to act on environmentalists' claims and demands before sound science could be considered.

Last summer, irrigation water was shut off to farmers because federal biologists assumed that a certain amount of water must remain in flow for fish. After havoc was wrecked National Academy of Sciences issued a report declaring there was not sufficient scientific evidence to support the federal denial of water in the Klamath Basin.

The story of the lynx differs only slightly from these past experiences.

In the case of the spotted owl, biologists are still debating over the best habitat years after policies shut down forests. In the Klamath Basin, deficient science was discovered months after entire crops were lost due to lack of water. In the case of the lynx, we learned immediately that fraudulent science had the potential to shape land use policy.

In my mind, and in the minds of many westerners, many issues remain unknown. For example, just how involved were the Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife? Why, according to the Inspector General were the offending employees given bonuses before the scandal was exposed? Were the biologists willingly pursuing the expansion of lynx habitat to the Wenatchee and Gifford Pinchot National Forests? The GAO has now concluded its report and I am hopeful today's hearing will get to the bottom of these questions.

What is abundantly clear to residents of Central Washington and communities around the west is that land use policies are *too often* void of sound science.

And, judging from experience, it is clear that the void is far deeper than the handful of biologists in the lynx survey.

It is also clear that when federal agencies carry out the Endangered Species Act, the line between scientific evidence, assumptions and personal agendas blurs. This is unacceptable.

We have been told by the agencies that submitting fake hair caused no negative effect to the lynx survey. But how can we be sure this sort of deception is not systemic? Federal agencies must not be allowed to hide breaches in science to be sorted out later upon discovery.

The forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife make their land use policies in order to enforce the law—the Endangered Species Act. If you have witnessed the devastation that these policies can have on entire economies and affected communities, you realize the power of the law. Enforcement can not continue to be based on hunches and assumptions masquerading as scientific fact. Nor should there be any room for ideological agendas. Every decision must be based on irrefutable hard evidence—sound science.

When sound science is pushed aside because it is inconvenient or because employees want to pursue personal agendas, there must be consequences. There certainly are consequences for the communities forced to bear the brunt of these decisions.