



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Survey Summary February 2005

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) distributed a 42-question survey to more than 1,400 USFWS biologists, ecologists, botanists and other science professionals working in Ecological Services field offices across the country to obtain their perceptions of scientific integrity within the USFWS, as well as political interference, resources and morale. Nearly 30% of the scientists returned completed surveys, despite agency directives not to reply—even on personal time.

I. Political Interference with Scientific Determinations

Large numbers of agency scientists reported political interference in scientific determinations.

- Nearly half of all respondents whose work is related to endangered species scientific findings (44%) reported that they “have been directed, for non-scientific reasons, to refrain from making jeopardy or other findings that are protective of species.” One in five agency scientists revealed they have been instructed to compromise their scientific integrity—reporting that they have been “directed to inappropriately exclude or alter technical information from a USFWS scientific document,” such as a biological opinion;
- More than half of all respondents (56%) knew of cases where “commercial interests have inappropriately induced the reversal or withdrawal of scientific conclusions or decisions through political intervention;” and
- More than two out of three staff scientists (70%) and nearly nine out of 10 scientist managers (89%) knew of cases “where U.S. Department of Interior political appointees have injected themselves into Ecological Services determinations.” A majority of respondents also cited interventions by members of Congress and local officeholders.

II. Negative Effect on Wildlife Protection

While a majority of the scientists indicated that agency “scientific documents generally reflect technically rigorous evaluations of impacts to listed species and associated habitats,” there is evidence that political intrusion has undermined the USFWS’s ability to fulfill its mission of protecting wildlife from extinction.

- Three out of four staff scientists and even higher proportions of scientist managers (78%) felt that the USFWS is not “acting effectively to maintain or enhance species and their habitats, so as to avoid possible listings under the Endangered Species Act;”

- For those species already listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA, more than two out of three scientists (69%) did not regard the USFWS as effective in its efforts toward recovery of those listed species;
- Nearly two out of three scientists (64%) did not feel the agency “is moving in the right direction;” and
- More than two-thirds of staff scientists (71%) and more than half of scientist managers (51%) did not “trust USFWS decision makers to make decisions that will protect species and habitats.”

III. Chilling Effect on Scientific Candor

Agency scientists reported being afraid to speak frankly about issues and felt constrained in their roles as scientists.

- More than a third (42%) said they could not openly express “concerns about the biological needs of species and habitats without fear of retaliation” in public while nearly a third (30%) did not feel they could do so even inside the confines of the agency;
- Almost a third (32%) felt they are not allowed to do their jobs as scientists;
- A significant minority (19%) reported having “been directed by USFWS decision makers to provide incomplete, inaccurate or misleading information to the public, media or elected officials;” however,
- Scientific collaboration among USFWS scientists, academia and other federal agency scientists appears to be relatively untainted by this chilling effect, with a strong majority (83%) reporting they felt free to collaborate with their colleagues on species and habitat issues.

IV. Resources and Morale

There was a broad perception that the agency lacks the resources to accomplish its mission. Not surprisingly, results showed a strain on staff morale.

- Half of all scientific staff reported that morale is poor to extremely poor and only 0.5% rated morale as excellent;
- More than nine out of ten (92%) did not feel that the agency “has sufficient resources to adequately perform its environmental mission;” and
- More than four out of five (85%) said that funding to implement the Endangered Species Act is inadequate.

The survey was sent to 1,410 scientists, of which 414, or 29.4%, responded to the survey.

###



Survey of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Ecological Services Employees

Note: A certain percentage of responses for most questions were left blank. These figures are not included below causing, in many cases, the percentages listed to equal less than 100%.

RESOURCES

1. USFWS Ecological Services has sufficient resources to adequately perform its environmental mission.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall

1.2% 4.8% 1.9% 40.3% 51.4%

2. My office efficiently uses the resources available to it.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall

15.0% 45.7% 7.7% 22.9% 8.5%

3. Based on the program's role in fulfilling the mission of Ecological Services, for each program listed below indicate whether the resource allocation is: *excessive, adequate, inadequate* or *don't know*.

a. Endangered Species Act

excessive *adequate* *inadequate* *don't know*

overall

1.2% 10.6% 84.8% 3.1%

b. Partners for Wildlife

excessive *adequate* *inadequate* *don't know*

overall

1.9% 29.0% 41.5% 27.1%

c. Section 404 Clean Water Act

excessive *adequate* *inadequate* *don't know*

overall

0% 11.4% 60.6% 28.0%

d. FWCA

excessive *adequate* *inadequate* *don't know*

overall
0.2% 18.8% 44.0% 36.5%

e. NEPA

excessive *adequate* *inadequate* *don't know*

overall
0.7% 21.0% 48.6% 29.2%

f. Contaminants

excessive *adequate* *inadequate* *don't know*

overall
1.7% 10.9% 60.6% 26.6%

PROFESSIONALISM

4. I feel free to openly collaborate with my scientific colleagues employed in academia or other public agencies on species and habitat issues.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
25.6% 57.0% 1.7% 10.1% 4.3%

5. I am afforded appropriate time and resources to keep up with advances in my profession.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
3.4% 33.3% 2.2% 44.2% 16.2%

6. I am allowed to publish work in peer-reviewed scientific journals regardless of whether it adheres to agency policies and positions.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
0.7% 20.0% 53.9% 16.9% 7.0%

7. I am encouraged to actively participate in scientific professional societies and organizations.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
6.0% 50.2% 5.8% 30.7% 6.0%

8. I respect the integrity and professionalism of USFWS decision makers.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
0.5% 32.6% 9.4% 36.0% 18.6%

CLIMATE

9. I work in an environment of mutual trust and respect.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
8.0% 48.1% 2.7% 27.1% 12.1%

10. I feel that I am allowed to do my job as a scientist.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
6.8% 56.8% 3.6% 22.0% 9.9%

11. Within the agency I can openly express my concerns about the biological needs of species and habitats without fear of retaliation.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
12.6% 49.0% 7.5% 18.1% 11.6%

12. Outside the agency I can openly express my concerns about the biological needs of species and habitats without fear of retaliation.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
5.6% 38.4% 13.0% 29.2% 12.8%

MISSION

13. USFWS fosters a work place ethic consistent with the agency's mission to "conserve, protect and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagrees*

overall
7.7% 44.9% 6.0% 29.7% 9.9%

14. USFWS Ecological Services is acting effectively to maintain or enhance species and their habitats, so as to avoid possible listings under the Endangered Species Act.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall

1.9% 13.3% 9.2% 52.2% 22.9%

15. USFWS Ecological Services is effectively accomplishing efforts toward recovery of Endangered Species Act listed species.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall

1.2% 19.1% 10.1% 48.3% 20.5%

16. In my opinion, USFWS Ecological Services is moving in the right direction.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall

0.7% 21.0% 12.8% 44.0% 20.3%

MANAGEMENT

17. I trust USFWS decision makers to make decisions that will protect species and habitats.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall

0.5% 20.0% 10.6% 37.7% 29.7%

18. Scientific input from Ecological Services research staff receives appropriate consideration in decisions regarding protection of species and habitats.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall

3.1% 23.2% 19.3% 33.8% 18.1%

19. My Regional Directorate will stand up for scientific staff or supervisors who take controversial stands.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall

2.2% 17.6% 25.6% 30.0% 23.4%

20. My office supervisor will stand up for scientific staff who take controversial stands.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall

13.3% 43.0% 13.0% 14.5% 14.7%

CANDOR

21. USFWS routinely provides complete and accurate information to the public on ESA issues.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
6.5% 42.5% 19.8% 23.2% 7.5%

22. USFWS technical information is easily accessible to interested members of the public.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
4.1% 48.3% 22.2% 21.3% 3.4%

23. I have been directed by USFWS decision makers to provide incomplete, inaccurate or misleading information to the public, media or elected officials.

frequently *occasionally* *seldom* *never* *not applicable*

overall
1.4% 7.7% 9.4% 68.1% 11.8%

SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY.

24. In my experience, scientific documents generally reflect technically rigorous evaluations of impacts to listed species and associated habitats.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
7.5% 54.3% 13.8% 18.1% 4.3%

25. USFWS strives to substantially incorporate independent peer review in formulating and validating scientific findings.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
7.7% 52.2% 16.4% 18.8% 3.6%

26. I have been directed to inappropriately exclude or alter technical information from a USFWS scientific document.

frequently *occasionally* *seldom* *never* *not applicable*

overall
2.2% 8.9% 9.2% 68.8% 10.4%

27. I have been directed, for non-scientific reasons, to refrain from making jeopardy or other findings that are protective of species.

frequently occasionally seldom never not applicable

overall
3.6% 14.0% 13.3% 39.4% 29.2%

28. As a norm, USFWS scientific documents and reports rely upon the best available science.

strongly agree agree don't know disagree strongly disagree

overall
15.0% 60.1% 9.2% 11.6% 2.9%

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

29. I know of cases where U.S. Department of Interior political appointees have injected themselves into Ecological Services determinations.

strongly agree agree don't know disagree strongly disagree

overall
43.2% 30.0% 22.9% 2.7% 0.5%

30. I know of cases where political appointees from other federal departments or agencies (for example, OMB, CEQ, USDA, DOD) have injected themselves into Ecological Services determinations.

strongly agree agree don't know disagree strongly disagree

overall
21.3% 21.0% 51.0% 5.3% 0.7%

31. I know of cases where members of Congress have injected themselves into Ecological Services determinations.

strongly agree agree don't know disagree strongly disagree

overall
26.3% 28.0% 40.3% 3.9% 0.7 %

32. I know of cases where state, tribal or local governments/elected officials have injected themselves into Ecological Services determinations.

strongly agree agree don't know disagree strongly disagree

overall
23.7% 31.9% 37.0% 6.3% 0.5 %

33. I know of cases where commercial interests have inappropriately induced the reversal or withdrawal of USFWS scientific conclusions or decisions through political intervention.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
25.4% 30.9% 36.2% 5.6% 1.0%

34. Political influence on Ecological Services determinations is balanced between influence from commercial/economic interests and influence from environmental/conservation interests.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
3.9% 18.8% 21.3% 32.9% 21.7%

JOB SATISFACTION

35. I would recommend that young scientists consider USFWS Ecological Services as a career.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
14.3% 45.7% 9.7% 21.3% 7.7%

36. My personal job satisfaction at Ecological Services has increased over the past few years.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
4.3% 25.1% 7.5% 36.7% 24.4%

37. I feel that Ecological Services values my professional expertise and applies it to achieve the greatest scientific benefit to agency decisions.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
6.3% 47.6% 9.7% 23.4% 12.1%

38. Ecological Services offers opportunity for advancement based on scientific expertise, not just on administrative and supervisory expertise.

strongly agree *agree* *don't know* *disagree* *strongly disagree*

overall
0.5% 22.0% 3.9% 29.7% 10.1%

NOTE: 32.8% of responses to this question were blank due to an error in the survey document – no answer choices.

39. Morale within Ecological Services is:

excellent *good* *fair* *poor* *extremely poor* *don't know*

overall

0.5% 11.6% 34.5% 30.4% 19.6% 1.4%

40. My current position at USFWS is:

Management/Supervisory *Non-Supervisory/Staff*

overall

18.8% 79.2%

41. My current grade level is:

7 9-12 13-15

overall

1.7% 80.0% 16.2%

42. The integrity of the scientific work produced by USFWS Ecological Services could best be improved by:

Essay Response No Response

overall

66.9% 33.1%
