

EPA

Former water official accuses press shop of smear campaign

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A former senior U.S. EPA official who accused the agency of abandoning science when she quit last year is now charging the agency with coordinating a smear campaign aimed at discrediting her and intimidating current employees.

Elizabeth "Betsy" Southerland worked for EPA for 30 years, most recently directing the Office of Water's Office of Science and Technology.

Upon leaving EPA in August, Southerland publicly released a fiery exit memo cited in multiple national media outlets saying the Trump administration's tenure at EPA had led to "the temporary triumph of myth over truth" ([Greenwire](#), Aug. 1, 2017).



Elizabeth
Southerland. U.S.
EPA

EPA's press office was swift to denounce Southerland at the time. Spokesman Jahan Wilcox told E&E News then, "It's hard to believe that Elizabeth Southerland is retiring because of a budget proposal and not because she's eligible for her government pension." Wilcox **told** other publications that Southerland had said she was retiring due to a family issue and that "despite the false outrage," she would receive a "six-figure taxpayer-funded pension."

The New York Times later **reported** that Southerland had been the target of research by a Republican public relations firm hired by the agency to weed out "resistance fighters" who worked there.

Now, with the help of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Southerland is **suing** EPA for not yet responding to Freedom of Information Act requests for documents filed in October.

"In an effort to discredit me for speaking out and to intimidate current EPA employees, EPA may have provided my private employment information to media outlets and a political opposition research firm following my retirement," Southerland said in a statement. "It is disappointing that a career public servant could be treated with such malicious intent."

PEER also said in a press release that Wilcox's statement about Southerland's pension was "a falsehood repeated for weeks, despite Betsy correcting it."

"It is unfortunate that the EPA Office of Public Affairs has devolved into a tax-supported disinformation ministry, willing to smear even its most distinguished employees," said PEER general counsel Paula Dinerstein. "Belying its title, EPA's Office of Public Affairs snipes from the shadows and recoils from transparency like a bat from sunlight."

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