

Opening Statement
Chair Raúl M. Grijalva
Committee on Natural Resources Oversight Hearing
When Science Gets Trumped: Scientific Integrity at DOI
Thursday, July 25, 2019

I want to extend a special thank you to our witnesses for taking the time to be here. Two of our witnesses in particular will be sharing experiences that have been difficult for them, so I also want to recognize their remarkable courage in speaking out and sharing their stories with us.

Today's hearing will examine scientific integrity—or rather, the *lack* of scientific integrity—under the current administration at the Department of the Interior.

It's no secret that the Trump administration is not a fan science. Especially when it comes to the science that has overwhelmingly determined that climate change is caused by humans and is threatening nearly every aspect of our lives, and certainly of the work of this committee.

We have seen story after story about climate change being deleted from government websites, senior advisors suggesting we consider “alternative facts,” and science and climate change deniers being appointed to leadership positions.

But there are few places in the Trump administration where this attack on science has been more intense than the Department of the Interior.

Today, we are going to hear from two people who were employed with the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior. Their stories are deeply disturbing, but unfortunately not unique.

In fact, one of the hardest parts of putting together this hearing was narrowing down the list of troubling incidents to just two.

We could have also talked about Steve Spangle, the now-retired Fish and Wildlife Service employee in my home state of Arizona. Mr. Spangle says he was pressured by a, quote, high level politico to change his decision about the impacts of a housing development on endangered and threatened species.

The development in question is massive, with nearly 28,000 homes, plus golf courses and other amenities. In the already parched Arizona desert, there is no question that this development would devastate the nearby San Pedro River, the last major free-flowing river in the entire southwest.

But, as it turns out, that development just happens to be owned by one of Trump's good buddies and donors, Mike Ingram.

We could have also talked about the Fish and Wildlife Service's biological opinion on three major pesticides that was ready to be released to the public but is now just gathering dust because Secretary Bernhardt has shelved it until after the next election.

We know that one of those pesticides alone could put 1400 threatened and endangered species in jeopardy. This is the same pesticide that is so harmful to babies' brain development that some states have already passed bans on any use of it at all.

But, as it turns out, pesticide and chemical manufacturers like Dow Chemical didn't like what the science had to say.

And that just begins to scratch the surface of the many attacks on science we've heard about at Interior.

Of course, there are also all the stories we probably *haven't* heard yet.

There are the stories that career scientists at Interior are too afraid to share. And with good reason. They have seen their colleagues, like our witnesses, get threatened, harassed, reassigned, and retaliated against.

Interior's leadership has created a culture of fear and intimidation for scientists, not integrity.

And let me be clear—it's not just the scientists who are the victims in all of this. It is our wildlife, our public lands—and us.

When federal agencies ignore science and the facts, major decisions no longer represent what is best for the health or safety of the American people and our environment.

They represent the interests of the highest bidder.

I was hoping that the Interior Department would be able to help clear up some of the questions about their treatment of science. We extended them an invitation ahead of their unofficial deadline. But they refused to come. I can see why. It's hard to defend.