

Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Oversight Hearing
1334 Longworth House Office Building
September 10, 2024
10:30 AM

Oversight Hearing titled “The Fish and Wildlife Service Gone Wild: Examining Operation Long Tail Liberation”

Questions from Rep. Gosar for Dr. Donna Clemons (retired), D.V.M., DACLAM, Retired Research Veterinarian

- 1. During your career, have you had direct interactions with the FWS? What were the nature of those interactions?**
 - a. In your experience, is the FWS neutral to customers in terms of imports?**
 - b. Do they follow the rules for permitting, or do they put their thumb on the scale to get the outcome that they want?**

Throughout my 30+-year research career, I have had numerous direct interactions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), primarily concerning the acquisition of re-export permits for biological samples from nonhuman primates. These experiences have often been frustrating due to erratic permit granting, long and unexplained delays that can range from six weeks to over six months, and instances where permits expired without any action from the FWS, necessitating the resubmission of identical applications to restart the process. A particularly challenging encounter occurred in February 2019 when two investigators unexpectedly arrived at my home late in the evening after my husband, and I had returned from celebrating my birthday. They aggressively interrogated me regarding NHP importation and foreign breeders based on work I had conducted seven years prior. When I requested legal representation, they returned two hours later with a subpoena, which was ultimately withdrawn in favor of an interview at my attorney's office.

In my experience, the FWS does not maintain neutrality towards customers regarding imports. This lack of impartiality also extends to re-export permits. Conversations with FWS staff and colleagues at other institutions revealed that certain organizations and purposes for import/export permitting receive preferential treatment. For instance, sanctuaries could obtain permits within days, while research institutions often faced delays of weeks or even months. During a meeting at the Arlington FWS office, I was discreetly informed that "not everyone likes what you do," suggesting that my permits were frequently placed at the "bottom of the stack" for processing.

Based on these observations, it appears that the FWS does not strictly adhere to permitting rules. Instead, their actions seem influenced by biases towards specific types of work or institutions, leading to inconsistencies in how permits are processed and granted.

I strongly believe that they put their thumb on the scale. There appear to be individuals within agencies, including the FWS who use their authority to support a private agenda. Industry insiders have long concluded that applications related to research are discriminated against while other activities are favored.

2. Based on your testimony, I understand that there are now fewer long-tailed macaques imported into the United States for medical research under the Biden Administration. How has this impacted medical research in the United States?

Over the past four years, imports of macaques for medical use have declined by over 50%. It goes to reason that medical research relying on these animals has declined as well. At the same time, these very same animals are being imported by China, Japan, and Canada for medical research in those countries.

3. Do you believe that medical research has declined in the United States but increased in foreign countries over the past four years due to the policies adopted by the Biden Administration?

Yes. The USA is the only country effectively embargoing these animals, guaranteeing the offshoring of billions in research to rival countries such as China, which have access to the resources. For those companies who choose to continue their research, this means outsourcing this work to other countries, putting US supremacy in science and our intellectual property at greater risk.

Questions from Rep. Stansbury for Dr. Donna Clemons

1. Is it your position that current demand for macaques in medical research in the US cannot be met with verified captive bred monkeys?

No. My position is that at this time, the demand cannot be met with domestic-bred NHPs, meaning those bred in the U.S. Importing primates from established foreign colonies, where the climate is suitable for large-scale breeding operations, is a critical component of the research resources needed.

2. Do you think it is acceptable to use wild macaques for research purposes?

Based on the natural history of macaques, all of these animals are considered wild, as they have never been domesticated. A more accurate distinction might be between captive-bred and wild-caught macaques.

Captive-bred animals are generally preferred for medical research because they are better defined in terms of lifetime health conditions, genetics, diet, and other factors. Ethical sourcing is a top priority for research organizations, meaning the origin of the animals must be reliable.

The IUCN has noted that macaques are invasive in many parts of the world, posing a threat to local wildlife. As an invasive species, they have contributed to the endangerment and even extinction of certain bird and animal species. In efforts to control their population, macaques are often captured or killed. Therefore, using them to replenish breeding stocks or for selective research purposes could be seen as a more acceptable approach.