

Scientists seek endangered species changes

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- More than 1,300 scientists Monday called on two U.S. departments to overturn the Bush administration's last-minute rule changes to the Endangered Species Act.

In a letter to the Commerce and Interior departments, the Union of Concerned Scientists said the changes weakened the act's scientific foundation.

The regulations of concern allow federal agencies to decide for themselves if their projects would threaten imperiled species, the organization said in a news release. Previously, federal agencies were required to consult with biologists at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or National Marine Fisheries Service before undertaking or permitting projects.

"Many federal agencies do not have the scientific expertise to determine the consequences of federal projects on endangered species and may have vested interests in the implementation of a project," said Stuart Pimm, Doris Duke Professor of Conservation Ecology at Duke University, who helped with the scientists' letter. "The new rules exclude expert scientists -- who for decades have provided impartial review and critical analysis -- from the process."

The Obama administration has addressed the rule change, but has not formally overturned it.

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