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The Oct. 30 news story "Bush Appointee Said to Reject Advice on Endangered Species" correctly reported that new listings under the Endangered Species Act have declined in recent years. However, the article did not mention that the decline began during the Clinton administration, when environmental groups flooded the Fish and Wildlife Service with lawsuits that diverted the agency's resources away from new listings. During the past five years, we have worked hard to correct this inherited situation by tripling the service's listing budget to reduce a huge backlog of court orders.

A key goal of the law, however, is not simply to add species to the endangered list. Rather, the objective is to take actions that will eventually enable the removal of species from the list because they have recovered and are no longer threatened or endangered.

The most important step we can take to achieve this goal is to restore vital wildlife habitat. Between 2002 and 2006, under the leadership of President Bush, we have made tremendous progress in that effort by providing \$2.1 billion in grants to states, tribal and local communities, private landowners, and other partners to conserve and restore habitat. By working together to conserve and restore habitat, we are laying the foundation for species to recover, not merely to be listed as endangered.

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As a former director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I was disturbed by Julie MacDonald's blatant assertion that she disregards the scientific conclusions of career Fish and Wildlife Service biologists when it comes to listings of endangered species.

The purpose of the Endangered Species Act, in its own language, is "to conserve to the extent practicable the various species of fish or wildlife and plants facing extinction." This responsibility should not be taken lightly, as it seems to have been by Ms. MacDonald, and the expertise of the biologists on the ground is paramount.

That a Bush appointee in the Interior Department is publicly bragging about her flippancy and sarcasm when it comes to real and dire circumstances facing threatened and endangered species is, in and of itself, unprofessional. But it is also causing unacceptable and irreparable damage to the plants and animals that should be listed based on scientific documentation and evidence.

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