

## A Case of Scientific Fraud

*The foxes are loose in the henhouse.*  
By Alston Chase

One of the great mysteries these days is why Bill Clinton allows preservationist zealots in his administration to anger the very states he must carry to win re-election. Thanks to his old-growth forest plan, he can kiss the Pacific Northwest goodbye. Likewise, California may be lost, since the fairy shrimp—species that are even less popular in the Golden State than illegal aliens—have been listed as endangered or threatened.

But more is at stake than the Arkansan's future. By promoting policies based on quack science, the White House invites ecological disaster.

The depths of this misguided fanaticism surfaced recently in a study released by the Interior Department's National Biological Survey, which, as reported by *The New York Times*, claims that more than half of America has "declined to the point of endangerment." Altogether, the report says, 30 ecosystems have declined more than 98 percent and are considered "critically endangered."

With this study, the administration reveals it has turned the foxes loose in the henhouse. One of its authors, Reed F. Noss, occasional contributor to the radical *Earth First Journal*, is an architect of the Wildlands Project. This plan, according to *Science* magazine, seeks to turn nearly half the country into wilderness or protected zones, but does not say what will happen to those who are displaced.

Indeed, the Survey's real intent seems to be scaring people into parting with their lib-

erties. Its true-believers are so obsessed with deconstructing society they ignore both the political and ecological consequences. For the real truth about preservation lies on the ground, far from Washington, and tells a very different story.

Consider recent research by independent

scholar Charles Kay at a sheep experiment station in Montana's Centennial Mountains. Comprising 16,646 acres, the station was graded every year since its establishment in 1922. But recently, a mounting chorus of critics have insisted the area is overgrazed. Apparently believing that only its control can "save" the area, the Bureau of Land Management—which would like to own this land but doesn't—insisted, without a shred of evidence, that overgrazing was causing sediments to fill in Red Rock Lakes, a

national wildlife refuge. And an environmental group, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition which advocates turning the region into wilderness, has called for closing the station.

To help settle the issue, in 1993, Mr. Kay was asked to examine the grazing impact. And what he found after two years of study was not comforting to critics.

Surveying willow communities along riparian (streamside) areas, where overuse would be most visible and most likely to cause soil erosion, Mr. Kay found few signs of distress. And what he did discover was caused by wildlife, not sheep. Many willows, aspen and subalpine fir "showed extensive signs of repeated browsing by wild ungulates, not domestic sheep....

Moose browsing also appears to be limiting willow catkin and seed production."

Nevertheless, the station's willow communities, he discovered, are in far better condition than those in nearby Yellowstone National Park, thereby confirming a 1993 paper by another researcher, which found that large numbers of elk had caused 100 times more erosion inside the park than out. Along streams at the sheep station, Mr. Kay found willow cover averaged 93 percent and plant height ranged from 47 inches to 13 feet, while in Yellowstone, the canopy was only 14 percent and the median height of plants was 13 inches!

Additionally, Mr. Kay searched for beaver in both places, recognizing that the presence or absence of this animal, which builds dams that slow runoff, is an important barometer of erosion. Finding no beaver in Yellowstone and "at least 44 active dams and seven active colonies" on the station's Odell Creek, he concluded there is "more beaver activity in the 12,885 acres of Odell drainage than there is on Yellowstone National Park's entire northern range (approximately 200,000 acres)."

Thus, Mr. Kay concluded, blaming sheep for erosion was misguided. Surprised, he looked everywhere for data that might establish this mythical connection, but was unable to find any.

Later, he learned a reason why: Cathy Whitlock, a University of Oregon geographer who studied the erosion prehistory of the refuge, had found that the highest rates of sedimentation at upper Red Rock Lake occurred during the later 1700s! After 1906, Miss Whitlock wrote, there was "a dramatic decrease... From 1914 to the present day, the accumulation rate has remained lower than the pre-1906 level."

Thus did Mr. Kay's experience reveal the growing disparity between political claims and scholarly evidence. Preservation policy is a product of scientific fraud, pure and simple. In the short run, Mr. Clinton will pay for this mistake at the polling booth. In the long run, both people and nature will suffer. ■

*Scholar/journalist Alston Chase writes a nationally syndicated newspaper column on the environment, distributed by Creators Syndicate. Story reprinted by permission of the author. ©Alston Chase*

## A Journalist's Guide To Scientific Correctness

*Fashion is in the jeans. Like owning Calvin Kleins, you either have it or not, and I don't. That's why I can't keep up with the changing whims of environmental science. By Alston Chase*

**W**hen it comes to keeping up with styles, I'm hopelessly out of it. I still sport the same chino slacks, button-downed shirts, tweed jackets and narrow ties I wore in college nearly 40 years ago, and somehow over the years managed to avoid double knits, Nehru jackets and those funny-looking baggy bombachas that my rich San Francisco friends were wearing last year.

Likewise, my political ideas haven't kept pace with the times. In the 1950s I was a card-carrying liberal; and while my views haven't changed, everyone else's have. The same opinions which prompted the U.S. Army to declare me a security risk back then are now cited by some late model liberals as proof positive I work for Attila the Hun. Go figure.

Fashion is in the jeans. Like owning Calvin Kleins, you either have it or not, and I don't. That's why I can't keep up with the changing whims of environmental science.

No field is more faddish. At the turn of the century, saving big game animals was the rage. Officials fed elk, bred bison and bashed wolves. Today they do the opposite—batter bison, breed wolves and encourage hunters to shoot elk. A generation ago old growth forests were called "biological deserts." Now they are revered for "biodiversity." Over the years, the field known as "restoration ecology" went into, then out of, then back into popularity, without once having been tried. Likewise, wildfires were first thought good, then bad, then good, and seem to be on their way out again. Ditto, the mysterious doctrine called "sustainable development."

Clearly, it is easier to trace changes in hemlines than to follow the mercurial vagaries of science. That's why I was so puzzled after reading scholarly articles challenging what I had been taught about forests and rangelands.

For years experts favored trees over grasses. Forests, they insisted, are "sinks" that trap carbon dioxide, which otherwise would remain in the atmosphere, causing runaway global warming. And logging and grazing, they intoned, "destroyed" forests and rangeland.

But the articles I read suggested these claims were wrong. "Temperate grasslands," observed University of Colorado biologist T. R. Seastedt and his University of Kansas associate A.K. Knapp, "are superior soil car-

bon sinks when compared to forests." Carbon stored by grass stays in the root system, whereas much forest carbon escapes after a wildfire. Meanwhile, increased atmospheric carbon dioxide may stimulate grass growth, thereby accelerating storage of this substance and reducing the risk of global warming.

Similarly, several papers noted the virtues of "disturbances" such as moderate logging and grazing. Seastedt and Knapp reported "grazing opens the canopy, maintains the foliage in a young physiological state, improves water relations for photosynthesis, and increases nitrogen availability to plant roots." It also discourages forests from encroaching on grasslands. Augustana College professor Larry L. Tieszen, along with colleagues from his biology department and The Nature Conservancy, found that along the Niobrara River in Nebraska, "Woodland expansion... has occurred since European settlement" due in part to fences, which limit grazing.

These articles confused me more than ever. Grazing can be good, they suggested; rangeland is a deterrent to global warming, yet preservation efforts are causing it to shrink. This means the Clinton administration's "War on the West"—that includes a clampdown on timber harvests and rangeland grazing—might be based on a mistake.

"Wow," I marveled, "these papers could revolutionize the grazing debate." But then I realized some were published more than four years ago. Why had they not captured headlines in the *Washington Post*?

Puzzled, I telephoned Professor Weathervane Grantgrabber, an expert on sci-

entific trends. "What determines political success of a scientific theory?" I asked.

"It must justify federal intervention," he said succinctly. "It should please environmental lobbyists, agency bosses, Washington journalists. And it should offer career opportunities to scientists. The researcher who says grazing is good might starve to death. But the one who predicts it will cause galactic meltdown gets the fat National Science Foundation stipend."

I hung up the phone, troubled. Grantgrabber's observation, I mused, means the end of science as a liberating force. In the 17th century this inquiry freed society from coercive church orthodoxies. But scientists have been losing their independence. In the 18th century they formed professional societies and became a bit less autonomous. By the 19th, they were salaried employees of

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universities. And today most earn a living, directly or indirectly, from government. If they feel pressure to justify coercion, then science has returned to where it was on June 22, 1633, when the Catholic Inquisition compelled the great physicist, Galileo, to deny the earth moved.

Thank goodness, I concluded, nonconformists such as Seastedt and Tieszen are still around, freely following intellectual curiosity. And I wondered, do they wear tweeds and chinos too? ■

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## ***A corrupt system of preservation science muzzles the government's own honest scholars. By Alston Chase***

**Is there a Dark Side?** You don't have to be Luke Skywalker to know the answer is "yes."

African Americans are often victims of the Dark Side—the stealth racism that pervades America. Loggers and ranchers encounter the Dark Side when they are driven off the land by the maneuvers of greens and their bureaucratic allies. Corporate and government whistle-blowers meet the Dark Side when they dare to expose their employers' follies.

The Dark Side is silent conspiracy, accomplished with nods, winks and confidential memos, that seeks to harm individuals whose actions are troublesome to the powerful. And it could not exist without the tacit acquiescence of the majority. When it strikes, most folks look the other way.

Many believe in a Dark Side, but selectively. Liberals see it only in big business, conservatives just in government. But some institutions remain above suspicion by nearly everyone. Such is the status of science, which enjoys such a lofty reputation that few challenge its authority.

But science has a Dark Side too, that lurks in the shadowy realm of environmental research. In this fecund habitat it thrives, shielded from exposure to the bright light of truth. But occasionally the covers are pulled back, revealing this netherworld of false scholarship.

Such was the experience of attentive observers at congressional oversight hearings on National Park Service science, held in February. This event revealed that not only is the agency's poor research a national tragedy, but that this failed effort is corrupting the institution of scholarship itself.

The meeting began ordinarily enough. A gentleman from the General Accounting Office testified to what experienced observers already knew: that service science is grossly inadequate. This presentation was followed by the usual self-aggrandizing testimony of the feds' favored scientists who said, in effect, that if Congress would give them more money everything could be fixed. To this they added a now familiar twist: that parks should be maintained as laboratories for themselves, where they can satisfy their curiosity at taxpayers' expense.

Then the deliberations got interesting. Three scholars testified that the service was allowing overly abundant elk and deer to destroy biodiversity throughout the park system. One of these individuals, **Richard Keigley of the Biological Resources Division of the U.S. Geological Survey, then added a zinger: His work, he said, is being suppressed by Interior Department authorities.**

Fearing elk are eliminating critical vegetation in Yellowstone National Park, Keigley sought to investigate whether this is so. But officials wouldn't let him. They even tried to prevent his testifying at this hearing.

Another witness, **Charles Kay from Utah State University, had analogous experiences. He told the congressmen how influential scholars, co-opted by Park Service monies, regularly suppress articles in supposedly "independent" journals that do not support federal management.** This was shocking stuff. Yet many congressmen listening from the dias seemed unmoved. Aside from the few lawmakers hailing from states where the Interior Department is the big bully on the block, few showed curiosity about the plight of Keigley and none of the experiences of Kay. Congressmen from eastern states, in particular, monkeys who wanted to hear no evil, refused to believe that the Dark Side Keigley and Kay experienced, could exist.

But it does exist, within virtually every federal agency conducting conservation science. **Keigley and Kay are merely the latest victims of the corrupt system of official science that muzzles its own honest scholars and even seeks to ruin the careers of independent professors who oppose it.** Whistle-blowers are whistled right out of their agencies, and university professors who dare to question policy find their research funding and opportunities dry up and their own articles rejected by academic journals whose editors are on the government payroll.

**Coverup has become the name of the game in federal bureaucracies and even in some university departments.** And why is this happening? To prevent the public from learning this simple truth: that U.S. preservation policies rest on a fraudulent, pseudo-scientific hypothesis, and as a result, these policies are failing.

This policy is called "natural regulation" or "ecosystems management." It is based on the hypothesis that nature is composed of networks of interconnected parts which interact to keep everything in equilibrium. So long as these systems retain all their members (i.e., sustain their biological diversity), it is supposed, they'll remain healthy. But if they lose enough parts (i.e., species), their capacity for self-regulation fails and they become unstable.

This hypothesis is popular because it seems to explain what has gone wrong with the environment and how to fix it: Environmental health requires ecosystems to remain in balance—or within "the historic range of variability"—which in turn demands that they retain their biodiversity. And the best way to ensure these conditions is to leave ecosystems alone. Achieving preservation, according to the official policy, is to restore its "missing parts" (i.e., "reintroducing" creatures such as wolves) then "let nature take its course."

Hence, the aim of federal preservation is to restore habitats that supposedly existed before "ecosystems" were "damaged" by humans. In the federal lexicon, this is called "recreating pre-settlement conditions"—a notion that is written into every federal law and into the gamut of "ecosystem management" schemes of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and other land management agencies.

And while this may look scientific, it's actually based on myth. The concept of a stable, self-regulating ecosystem, scientists concede, is fundamentally flawed. There is no "balance of nature." Original conditions never existed. Rather, landscapes are continually changing, in response to the vagaries of weather, volcanoes, floods, hurricanes and human activities. Random disturbance, not permanence or order, governs nature. Left alone, biological communities do not tend toward equilibrium, but fluctuate dramatically.

As the prominent ecological historian, Donald Worster explained, "the ecosystem has receded in usefulness, and in their place we have the idea of the lowly 'patch.' Nature should be regarded as a landscape of patches, big and little ... changing continually through time and space, responding to an unceasing barrage of perturbations."