

Connecting Science and Decision Making under the Endangered Species Act: The Case of Polar Bears

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Talk Summary

In 2008, the US Department of the Interior listed the polar bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, the first such listing in which significant threats to the species were linked to climate change. The decision required information drawing from global circulation modeling of projected sea ice conditions over 100 years, bear biology, and linkages between physical and biological scientists in a context of limited data, all of which present significant uncertainties. Yet the law requires decisions within a specific timeframe, applying legal terms such as "foreseeable future" and "reasonably likely to occur." Decision makers and scientists engaged in ongoing dialogue across 'boundaries' to frame questions that resulted in additional scientific analysis designed to reduce uncertainties and inform the final decision.

BIO

P. Lynn Scarlett is a leading US environmental policy executive and analyst. She is Managing Director, Public Policy at the Nature Conservancy. She was the Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Secretary of the Interior from 2005 to 2009, having previously served as the Assistant Secretary of Policy, Management and Budget from 2001 to 2005. Appointed by President George W. Bush, Scarlett was sworn in as Deputy Secretary of the Interior on November 22, 2005. In 2006 she served as acting Secretary of the Interior between the administrations of Gale Norton and Dirk Kempthorne. While at DOI she chaired the federal Wildland Fire Leadership Council (2004–05). She also co-chaired the First Lady's Preserve America Initiative on historic preservation (2003–08). She also chaired DOI's Climate Change Task Force, which examined the effects of climate change on land, water, wildlife and infrastructure. Scarlett convened and chaired the Department's Cooperative Conservation Working Group, and also represented the Department on an interagency cooperative conservation task force that planned and convened the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation in 2005. In her management capacities, Scarlett served on the President's Management Council and its executive steering committee.

Before joining the administration, Scarlett was President of the Reason Foundation, a national public policy think tank based in Los Angeles. From 2010-2013 she was Co-Director, Center for the Management of Ecological Wealth at Resources for the Future.

She was a member of the national Commission on Climate and Tropical Forests, and of several National Research Council committees. She served on the boards of the National Parks Conservation Association, the National Wildlife Refuge Association, as well as acting as an advisor to several private-sector firms. She was Chair of the board of the American Hiking Society and of RESOLVE. She is a trustee emeritus of the Udall Foundation.

In 2009, she was elected as Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration.