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Bush endangered species plan criticized

WASHINGTON, Aug. 26 (UPI) -- The Bush administration's proposal to reinterpret the Endangered Species Act is being criticized by the Ecological Society of America.

The group particularly objected in a Tuesday press release to Bush plans announced Aug. 15 to eliminate requirements for federal projects to undergo independent scientific review. New procedures would allow federal agencies to decide for themselves whether their projects would harm endangered plants and animals.

"The concept of independent scientific review has been in practice since the 18th century and is crucial to ensuring that ideas and proposed work are scientifically sound," said [Alison Power](#), president of the society. "This overhaul of the Endangered Species Act would place the fate of rare species in the hands of government stakeholders who are not qualified to assess the environmental impacts of their activities."

The Bush proposal would present a conflict of interest, erasing the distinction between scientific review and politics, concluded the Society, noting the threat to more than 2000 of the United States' rarest plants and animals ranging from green sea turtles to Santa Cruz cypress trees.

U.S. official warns of global warming

WASHINGTON, Aug. 26 (UPI) -- A U.S. energy official has acknowledged that responding to global warming while meeting energy needs will be one of the greatest challenges faced by humanity.

[Raymond L. Orbach](#), the U.S. Department of Energy's undersecretary for science, reaches that conclusion in a two-part podcast entitled "Confronting Climate Change," published Tuesday as part of the American Chemical Society's Global Challenges/Chemistry Solutions series.

Orbach says this challenge will require "transformational breakthroughs in basic science" -- meaning revolutionary discoveries rather than common step-by-step scientific advances.

As an example he cites the development of artificial photosynthesis, the natural process used by plants to produce energy from water and sunlight. Artificial photosynthesis, or "photosynthesis without the plant," as Orbach put it, could potentially open the door to fueling cars of the future with water rather than gasoline. Water could be split by artificial photosynthesis into hydrogen and oxygen, allowing clean-burning hydrogen fuel, Orbach explains in the podcast.

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Small, sustainable fishing being undercut

VANCOUVER, British Columbia, Aug. 26 (UPI) -- University of British Columbia researchers in Canada say small fisheries are undermined by ill-conceived eco-labeling initiatives and unfair fuel subsidies.

Even though small fisheries produce almost as much catch using one-eighth the fuel of industrial rivals, they are being driven out of business by poor policies, argues a study published in the current issue of the journal Conservation Biology.

"They are our best hope at sustainable fisheries," says [Daniel Pauly](#), Director of the UBC Fisheries Center and co-author of the study.

"Small-scale fisheries use fishing gear that are more selective and far less destructive to deep sea environments," added co-author Jennifer Jacquet. "As a result they discard very little unwanted fish and almost all of their catch is used for human consumption."

But governmental fuel subsidies up to 200 times what small fisheries receive and well-meaning but poorly thought out sustainable seafood initiatives such as eco-labeling have created a double whammy, they said.

"For the amount of resources invested, we haven't seen significant decrease in demand for species for which the global stocks are on the edge of collapse," says Pauly. "Market-based initiatives, while well-intentioned, unduly discriminate against small scale fishers for their lack of resources to provide data for certification."

Satellite shooting unneeded says scientist

BOSTON, Aug. 26 (UPI) -- The U.S. Navy's February missile shoot down of a spy satellite was unnecessary, a Harvard scientist and former NASA employee said.

Yousaf Butt filed a Freedom of Information Act request asking for the National Air and Space Agency's re-entry threat analysis from the disabled USA-193 satellite. His conclusions contradict the government's official explanation that the satellite's hydrazine fuel tank posed a health hazard.

Butt described government modeling as oversimplified and biased against likelihoods that the tank would have burned when re-entering the atmosphere.

"The official study released so far certainly doesn't support the contention that the tank

would have survived intact to the ground. In fact, despite its optimistic oversimplifications, the released study indicates that the tank would certainly have demised high up in the atmosphere" he wrote in the Aug. 21 Bulletin of Atomic Scientists.



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