

15 May 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

The undersigned scientific and professional societies, representing thousands of scientists and natural resource professionals, many of whom are employed by federal agencies, thank you for your support of scientific integrity through your memo of March 9, 2009. Your recognition of the role of science in natural resources decisions will strengthen resource management and enable our nation's natural resource professionals to perform their duties free from political interference. We are concerned, however, that those of our members who are federal employees are being denied the opportunity to fully participate in professional and scientific organizations, based on inconsistent and possibly incorrect interpretations of federal conflict of interest rules.

Scientific and professional organizations play many important roles in our society, including sharing information through scientific and popular publications, facilitation of expert networks, providing an independent and science-based perspective on relevant government policies, and professional development and certification programs. Full participation in professional societies is an important part of a scientist's or natural resource manager's career and professional development. Curtailing this involvement is detrimental to the federal agencies that employ scientists, in part because it will prevent the employee from achieving professional stature, thus dissuading the best scientists from entering federal service. It may distance the scientist or natural resource manager from the full interchange of information and ideas that are so vital to keeping current in the field and providing the best scientific or professional advice to the agency. These restrictions are particularly problematic for the "research-grade" or "four-factor" scientists, whose retention and promotion evaluations depend in part on recognition of stature by one's scientific colleagues.

While we understand that there are valid reasons for the government to limit in some ways the participation of federal employees in outside organizations, service on the board of an individual's professional society should not be subject to the same restrictions as other types of service. Indeed, leadership in professional societies is crucial to many natural resource professionals' careers and should be encouraged rather than hindered by the federal government. In addition, many scientific and professional societies have their own code of ethics and conflict of interest policies, which govern the activities of their board members. However, most agency policies do not recognize this. In recent years, some federal agencies seem to have decided that federal employees may not serve on the boards of outside organizations under any circumstances, or are creating conditions that make it virtually impossible to serve.

Thank you for your strong public support for scientific integrity in the federal government. The Office of Science and Technology Policy has an important role to play in this issue. Therefore, we are copying this letter to the Director of that office, and will follow up directly with

additional information. We would also appreciate direction from the administration to OSTP, encouraging them to consider addressing this issue. We hope we can work with your administration to ensure that all federal employees are free to fully participate in their professional and scientific societies.

Sincerely,

The Wildlife Society  
Society for Range Management  
American Fisheries Society  
Society of Wetland Scientists  
Society for Conservation Biology  
The Ornithological Council  
Society of American Foresters

cc: John Holdren, Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy  
John Berry, Director, Office of Personnel Management