

Stop the Unsupported, Unscientific Attacks on NPS Scientists

The peer-reviewed statistical analysis concerning a correlation between increased mariculture production and declining rates of harbor seal reproduction published by Dr. Ben Becker et al in 2011 is only one part of the record that will shape the outcome of the EIS on the Drake's Estero.

While this issue certainly has relevance, EAC continues to believe that the primary reason that commercial mariculture must end in 2012 is one of policy: a private enterprise like mariculture within the boundaries of a Congressionally-designed wilderness and a national park is flatly prohibited by both law and NPS policy. As conservationists, we rally in support of the vision of the Wilderness Act as conferring the highest form of protection for particularly unique and ecologically important natural areas-- of which our own Drake's Estero is a stunning example.

Additionally, we firmly believe that a weakening of the mandates of the Wilderness Act at Point Reyes would create a dangerous opening for widespread private, commercial exploitation of other public lands around the nation. The protection of these lands was hard-won and it needs our continued support to last.

That said, truth and integrity must comprise the essential foundation for scientific inquiry and those policy decisions that depend on it. Peer-reviewed science and its process should be honored, rather than attacked. For example, in the case of climate change, many deplored the Bush administration for penalizing scientists when their work revealed the unsettling truth of unprecedented human impacts on Planet Earth.

Dr. Goodman's reaction to Dr. Ben Becker's peer-reviewed paper, and for that matter, any other reports or information issued by NPS regarding Drake's Estero, is similar. It seems that because Dr. Becker's research paper reveals evidence that contradicts a political outcome which Mr. Goodman desires that Mr. Goodman feels justified to continually demonize Becker and other NPS personnel. It is a discredit to science and the scientific process.

Dr. Goodman is free to submit peer-reviewed science to support his personal opinion that the Becker 2011 paper is flawed. Indeed, it is fair to ask why Dr. Goodman himself has not offered an ounce of peer-reviewed data to support any of his continued attacks on the Point Reyes National Seashore?

We also wonder if Dr. Goodman's followers are aware that the March, 2011 Solicitor-General's report characterized him, the "informant", and his complaints as "specula[tive]," stated that Dr. Goodman made "unilateral conclusions," and that he "submitted arguments in an effort to destroy the credibility of all 2007 disturbance data, and to flatline that year's data, which would negate any statistical correlation between or among an increase in mariculture activities, evidence of pinniped harassment, and displacement of marine mammals in upper Drakes Estero." Such conduct is unscientific, unprofessional, and unsound. Indeed, it is no surprise that the National Academy of Science has distanced itself from him and his campaign in a public statement.

According to professional statistician Dr. Dominique Richard, Goodman's latest critique of Dr. Becker's 2011 research "is fundamentally flawed and arbitrarily removes relevant data points in an attempt to explain the dynamics of the Estero seals population as merely the "work of mother nature." Dr. Richard put Goodman's approach in laymen's terms by saying "If the only tool you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." He also characterized Goodman's review

as “deserving an F in a college level introductory statistics class” as well as an insult to the very diligent and fairly sophisticated analyses that the park provided. Dr. Richard has submitted a technical response to Dr. Goodman’s critique to the Marine Mammal Commission.

Dr. John Harwood, the Commission’s independent statistician from Scotland, writes in the first sentence of his review of Becker’s peer-reviewed research: “The analyses reported in Becker et al (2011) provide convincing evidence that the proportion of harbour seals and pups counted at the three haul-out sites closest to oyster cultivation in Drakes Estero was lower in years of high oyster production.”

Wilderness in 2012 has been the intent for Drakes Estero since October 20, 1976. The 1976 Point Reyes Wilderness Act, and the Committee Reports and testimony, are clear. In this time of tragic species decline and irreversible habitat alteration and destruction, it is all the more important to have the wilderness gifts, such as Drakes Estero, that our elders bestowed upon us.

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