

KEEP SCIENCE and SCIENTISTS CREDIBLE

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There are other common examples in scientific literature and discourse. In working with scientists, I often encounter value-laden terms like degradation, improvement, good, poor, impact, alien, or invasive. Scientists should avoid these normative words in conveying scientific information. Such words imply a preferred ecological state, a desired condition, an accepted benchmark, or a favored class of policy options.

This is not science, it is a form of policy advocacy. It may be subtle, perhaps unintentional, but it is patently stealth policy advocacy.

More specifically, consider the widespread use of concepts such as ecosystem health. It is normative science! Ecosystem health is a value-driven policy construct, but it is often passed off as science to unsuspecting policy-makers and the public. In practice, notions of healthy or damaged ecosystems are subtly calibrated by societal values and preferences.

About the Author:

Dr. Bob Lackey is professor of fisheries science at Oregon State University. In 2008 he retired after 27 years with the Environmental Protection Agency's national research laboratory in Corvallis where he served as Deputy Director, Associate Director for Science, and in other senior leadership positions. Since his very first fisheries and wildlife job mucking out raceways in a California trout hatchery, he has worked on an assortment of environmental and natural resource issues from various positions in government and academia. His professional assignments involved diverse and politically contentious issues, but mostly he has operated at the interface between science and policy. He has published over 100 articles in scientific journals and is a fellow of the American Fisheries Society and the American Institute of Fishery Research Biologists. Dr. Lackey has long been an educator, having taught at five North American universities and currently teaches a graduate course in ecological policy at Oregon State University. Canadian by birth, he is now a U.S.-Canadian dual-citizen living in Corvallis, Oregon.



Feral horses in North America are non-native, but many support their presence. Nothing in science says one species is innately better than another, or that one should be protected and another eradicated. Source: U.S. Department of Interior.

Along the same line, why is it that native species are almost always considered preferable to non-native species? Nothing in science says one species is innately better than another, that one species is inherently preferred, or that one species should be protected and another species should be eradicated.