

# Arctic scientist under investigation

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(AP) -- A federal wildlife biologist whose observation in 2004 of presumably drowned polar bears in the Arctic helped to galvanize the global warming movement has been placed on administrative leave and is being investigated for scientific misconduct, possibly over the veracity of that article.

Charles Monnett, an Anchorage-based scientist with the U.S. Bureau of [Ocean Energy](#) Management, Regulation and Enforcement, or BOEMRE, was told July 18 that he was being put on leave, pending results of an investigation into "integrity issues." But he has not yet been informed by the inspector general's office of specific charges or questions related to the scientific integrity of his work, said Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

On Thursday, Ruch's [watchdog group](#) plans to file a complaint with the agency on Monnett's behalf, asserting that Obama administration officials have "actively persecuted" him in violation of policy intended to protect scientists from political interference.

Monnett, who has coordinated much of the agency's research on Arctic wildlife and ecology, has duties that include managing about \$50 million worth of studies, according to the complaint, a copy of which was provided to The Associated Press.

The complaint seeks Monnett's reinstatement along with a public apology from the agency and inspector general. It also seeks to have the investigation dropped or to have the charges specified and the matter

carried out in accordance with policy. The complaint also says that investigators took Monnett's computer hard drive, notebooks and other unspecified items from him, which have not been returned.

A BOEMRE spokeswoman declined to comment on an "ongoing internal investigation." Ruch said BOEMRE has barred Monnett from talking to reporters.

Documents provided by Ruch's group indicate questioning by investigators has centered on observations that Monnett and fellow researcher Jeffrey Gleason made in 2004, while conducting an aerial survey of bowhead whales, of four dead [polar bears](#) floating in the water after a storm. They detailed their observations in an article published two years later in the journal *Polar Biology*; presentations also were given at scientific gatherings.

In the peer-reviewed article, the researchers said they were reporting, to the best of their knowledge, the first observations of polar bears floating dead offshore and presumed drowned while apparently swimming long distances in open water. Polar bears are considered strong swimmers, they wrote, but long-distance swims may exact a greater metabolic toll than standing or walking on ice in better weather.

They said their observations suggested the bears drowned in rough seas and high winds and "suggest that drowning-related deaths of polar bears may increase in the future if the observed trend of regression of pack ice and/or longer open water periods continues."

The article and presentations drew national attention and helped make the polar bear something of a poster child for the global warming movement. Al Gore's mention of the polar bear in his documentary on climate change, "An Inconvenient Truth," came up during investigators' questioning of Gleason in January.

In May 2008, the U.S. classified the polar bear as a threatened species, the first with its survival at risk due to global warming.

According to a transcript, investigator Eric May asked Gleason his thoughts on Gore referencing the dead polar bears. Gleason said none of the polar bear papers he has written or co-authored has said "anything really" about global warming.

"It's something along the lines of the changing environment in the Arctic," he said.

Gleason said others put their own spin on research or observations.

The complaint alleges Gleason and Monnett were harassed by agency officials and received negative comments from them after the article was published. Gleason eventually took another Interior Department job; he didn't respond to an email and a BOEMRE spokeswoman said he wouldn't be available for comment.

Ruch also claimed the investigation is being done by criminal investigators with no scientific background, even though the case is an administrative matter.

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