

# Official: Suspension unrelated to polar bear paper

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(AP) -- The recent suspension of Alaska wildlife biologist Charles Monnett is unrelated both to an article that he wrote about presumably drowned Arctic polar bears and to his scientific work, a federal official said Friday.

The director of the U.S. Bureau of [Ocean Energy](#) Management, Enforcement and Regulation, told agency staff in Alaska via email that it instead was the result of new information on a separate subject that was recently brought to officials' attention.

The email, written by Michael Bromwich, was obtained by The Associated Press.

There has been no "witch hunt" to suppress the work of our many scientists and discourage them from speaking the truth," said Bromwich, addressing assertions made by a group that filed a complaint against the agency on behalf of Monnett.

He added later: "Please be assured that you have my full support and that I look forward to working with you in the weeks and months ahead."

The group, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, said the Monnett was being "persecuted" and that investigators were asking him questions about his observation of the drowned [polar bears](#).

The Anchorage-based Monnett was placed on administrative leave July

18, pending final results of an inspector general's investigation into "integrity issues."

Monnett coordinated much of the agency's research on [Arctic wildlife](#) and ecology and had duties that included managing about \$50 million worth of studies, according to the complaint filed with the agency.

A memo dated days before July 18, sent to Monnett by contracting officer Celeste H. Rueffert, said that information raised by the investigation "causes us to have concerns about your ability to act as the Contracting Officer's Representative in an impartial and objective manner on the subject contract."

That same day, July 13, a stop-work order was issued for a polar bear tracking study, entitled "Populations and Sources of Recruitment in Polar Bears."

The memo was provided by the activist watchdog group.

A message was left for Monnett on Friday. An agency spokeswoman declined to speak about the stop-work order.

Spokeswoman Melissa Schwartz said Thursday that all the scientific contracts previously managed by Monnett are being managed by other agency scientists.

Documents provided by the watchdog group showed questioning by investigators earlier this year focused on the polar bear observations that Monnett and researcher Jeffrey Gleason made in 2004.

But the group's executive director, Jeff Ruch, said investigators have not yet told Monnett of the specific charges or questions related to the scientific integrity of his work.

According to a transcript, provided by Ruch's group, Ruch asked investigator Eric May, during questioning of Monnett in February, for specifics about the allegations. May replied: "well, scientific misconduct, basically, uh, wrong numbers, uh, miscalculations."

"This just gets more curious and curious," Ruch said Friday. He said he'd spoken with Monnett "almost every day," since the situation arose earlier this year, including Friday. He said Monnett had "no ideas" about why he'd been placed on leave.

"We'll keep digging," Ruch added.

Monnett and Gleason were conducting an aerial survey of bowhead whales in 2004 when they saw 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*.

In the peer-reviewed article, they said they were reporting, to the best of their knowledge, the first observations of the bears floating dead and presumed drowned while apparently swimming long distances.

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. They also added that the findings "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 broad attention and helped to galvanize the global warming movement.

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