

WILEY



Ethics in the Business of Science

Author(s): Charles H. Hanson

Source: *Ecology*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Jul., 1976), pp. 627-628

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the Ecological Society of America

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1936178>

Accessed: 18-09-2018 17:24 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Wiley, Ecological Society of America are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Ecology*

ECOLOGY

VOL. 57

SUMMER 1976

No. 4

NOTICE

Starting with Volume 58, No. 1 (Winter 1977), the COMMENTARY section will move from *ECOLOGY* to the *BULLETIN OF THE ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA*. This change was approved by the Board of Editors at the recent meeting in New Orleans. Effective immediately, please send all manuscripts intended for COMMENTARY to the Bulletin Editor, Dr. William E. Hazen, Department of Biology, San Diego State University, San Diego, California 92182. DO NOT send to the Review Editor, Robert L. Burgess.

RLB

COMMENTARY—ETHICS IN THE BUSINESS OF SCIENCE

The five years following enactment of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) have been marked by an increased environmental awareness in the general public and a rapid growth in the number of environmental consultants. These consultants have been charged with the responsibility to disclose the environmental consequences of a proposed action, thus alerting decision-makers and the public at large to the environmental risks involved. Environmental consulting has thus, in recent years, evolved into a highly profitable business. As with other profit motivated institutions, professional consultants are being faced with both financial and political pressures. The effect of such pressures on the objectivity and ethics of scientists is currently being questioned.

Applied environmental research clearly demands responsibility and integrity. However, there exists the opportunity for the disreputable few to compromise ethics for financial gain from this area of concern. The issue is a conflict of interest. Although these statements apply to only a small percentage of those involved in environmental research, ethical misconduct of even a few affects the reputation and credibility of professional environmental scientists and results in continued degradation of the environment. Furthermore, there exists a hierarchy of collusion among many consultants, unethical consulting firms, and clients.

Are scientists and engineers, employed by consulting firms, free to express their opinion if they oppose company policy which in their judgement is contradictory to scientific evidence? In many instances controversial findings of scientists employed by certain environmental consulting firms can be suppressed by insidious mechanisms such as the "Employment Agreement" shown below.

In addition to internal censorship and suppression of results opposing the preconceived conclusions regarding potential environmental damage, many clients retain the right to review and approve material prior to public release. In the case of such client review, tremendous pressure can be brought to bear on consultants, thus assuring suppression of undesirable results. Under such conditions detrimental environmental impacts and the cost of environmental protection for the proposed project are calculated—followed by a quiet reversion to an attitude that any technological development that has good economic payoffs should be pursued.

Who then should be responsible for regulating professional services to the public and evaluating performance of environmental consultants? At the present time governmental agencies have the responsibility of overseeing environmental research. However, like most facets of government, these agencies have become overburdened with the volume requiring their attention. Hence, the quality of environmental consulting has deteriorated in many cases to the point where environmental reports represent not an attempt to objectively report pertinent information on a given project accurately and concisely, but rather to build a case in the best interest of a client. This approach frequently represents little more than a voluminous, repetitious review of selected literature.

It would be naive to imply that a simple procedure exists for overseeing the ethical conduct of environmental researchers. Regulation and management of a business such as environmental consulting is obscured first by our lack of knowledge and understanding of ecological systems and secondly, by the wide diversity in projects to be evaluated. In addition, environmental consultants frequently are in-

interested in satisfying only the letter of the law and not the intent—a practice which leads to a documentation of ecological damage and not a prediction of the impact resulting from a proposed project. Compounding these problems is the inherent potential for conflict of interest when a client chooses to financially support a specific consulting firm for study of a proposed project when a favorable environment report is obviously in the clients' best interest. Regulation and management—the answer will come only if a concerted effort is made to uphold

a professional code of ethics, such as that developed by *The Ecological Society of America*, by those involved with environmental protection, including private consultants, researchers from universities, governmental agencies, industry and the general public.

CHARLES H. HANSON
 Wildlife and Fisheries Biology
 University of California
 Davis, CA 95616

EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENT

The undersigned employee hereinafter referred to as employee, hereby agrees that during employment with and after termination of employment for any cause by . . . or any of its affiliated companies, together hereinafter referred to as Company, except in the ordinary course of business for the company, will not divulge, give, or release either orally or in writing to any individual, firm, partnership, company, corporation, State, county, city, township, political subdivision or other entity, any of the following:

- 1) Any list or lists of clients of the Company or individual client names of the company;
- 2) Any information, data, research material, work product or documents either prepared by the employee or any other employee of the Company;
- 3) Any specifications, drawings, blueprints, computer printouts, or programs, graphs, charts, diagrams, test results or other data either prepared by the employee or any other employee of the Company, or any business methods, marketing plans, or business policies developed by the employee or other employees of the Company.

The employee agrees not to participate in any formal or informal proceedings, either legal or administrative, as an intervenor or to assist an intervenor or as a plaintiff or complainant or in any other capacity against any client of the Company whether an individual, firm, partnership, company, corporation, State, county, city, township, political subdivision or other entity.

DATED at _____, _____, on this _____ day of _____, 19_____.

 Signature

 (Type or print name)

Signed in my presence and sworn to before me this _____ day of _____, 19_____.

 Notary Public