

RESPONSE BY CONNIE BARLOW
to the 29 September 2021
USF&WS DECISION
on Barlow's
"PETITION TO DOWNLIST FLORIDA TORREYA"

From: Connie Barlow <conniebarlow52@gmail.com>
Subject: Good work on FL Torreya petition + next steps
Date: September 30, 2021 at 1:38:45 PM EDT
To: Lourdes Mena <lourdes_mena@fws.gov>, Chuck Underwood
<chuck_underwood@fws.gov>

SUMMARY: Your petition decision is fair and sound. Please consider urging F&WS to develop an explicit "**climate adaptation**" policy similar to what NPS published in April 2021, such that habitat amelioration need no longer be limited to the species "**historic range**."

Hello Lourdes and Chuck -

I am **the founder of Torrey Guardians** and the author of the downlist petition your agency decided upon. Just in case the govt has to shut down soon, I want to let you know something surprising:

I think **you did a very fair job on the decision** you made and how you wrote it up.

My aim was not so much to achieve a downlisting, but to get some attention that **the policy of "historic range" needs to have a "climate adaptation" update**, as pioneered by the National Park Service in April via its new "RAD" policy.

USDA has long been moving in the climate adaptive direction, without a great deal of fanfare. USFS research staff have published tree species range shift projections. As well, the agency is working to make the science of range shift accessible to forest owners and managers in the USA — including some very substantial work with **tribal forestry staff**. That work is carried out by staff at the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science.

I am deeply into the scholarship of USFS work in this regard. This year a Canadian and I coauthored a new, lengthy **wikipedia** page, and engaged academics in helping edit it:

"Assisted Migration of Forests in North America"

Just this week, I have had correspondence with **USFS NIACS staff, Stephen Handler, who is in charge of USFS tribal relations for the eastern USA**. I handed off to him networking I accomplished with a Potawatomi band here in southern Michigan, to enable gathering of pawpaw fruit from a county nature preserve. County authorization to the tribe apparently will include that the tribe can make its own decisions about whether any of the wild seeds are shared with a northern Michigan Odawa band, which would constitute a form of "**assisted range expansion**", which as you know is still controversial.

Bottom line: **I believe the USF&WS branch of DOI can produce a policy statement that would authorize, on a case-by-case basis, "endangered species" decisions to begin including climate adaptive responses in favor of suitable conditions in "projected ranges"** — not just limited to trying to manipulate the habitat of "historic ranges" to enable species thrival again. This is especially vital for any plant species classified as a "**glacial relict**" to ever achieve suitable habitat in this rapidly changing climate. New habitat poleward is the only chance to ever delist the plant. Otherwise "safeguarding genetic materials" will be perpetual and never enable a full wild presence.

Crucially, such a policy statement would ensure that there is no need to reopen the Endangered Species Act to legislative update. Along these lines, please consider that the 50th anniversary of the ESA is in 2023. **The actions of Torreya Guardians in using an "exception" in the act** deliberately legislated exclusively for plants (owing to the importance of not having to command botanical gardens to tear out their plantings newly listed) has been widely reported in the media and, generally in a positive way, in **academic forestry journals** — which have a distinct worldview from the conservation biology journals. In contrast, right now, the two botanical gardens officially in control of the ex situ seed producton are unnecessarily limiting their plans to bringing the historic range back into thrivability — a futile prospect to all but the remaining **climate deniers**. I have heard that all botanical gardens north of Georgia requesting seeds from the State Botanical Garden of Georgia and the Atlanta Botanical Garden must sign a memorandum of understanding disclaiming any intention to use the seeds for "assisted migration" experimentation. The issue is still that divisive.

Please recall that the results of the **FOIA** I submitted March 2019 confirmed that there had been **no documentation** up to that point of, what we know had been, the thousands of seeds produced annually at the two ex situ groves in north Georgia — controlled by the two botanical gardens hostile to our citizen approach. Then, during the previous administration, the **2020 Recovery Plan update** not only ignored our achievements (well recognized by your staff in the current petition decision, thank you) but referred to us in writing as "a religious group based out of northern Georgia." This is a **slandorous statement** that I hope the administration will correct.

I would be grateful to have an **off-the-record phone conversation** with you, as my preference is to move ahead in a **collaborative** way in this new administration. Do know that I happen to know the chair of the governing council of **The Nature Conservancy**, Fran Ulmer, and she has forwarded to staff my hopes that TNC could step in to request dispersal authorization of some of the tens of thousands of seeds currently produced in ex situ locales in n. Georgia. I predict, however, that nothing will happen at TNC until F&WS itself seeks TNC help in accepting and managing **poleward dispersal for "assisted migration experimentation" of nonessential seed production from the ex situ safeguarding groves.**

As background prior to collaborative conversation, please read the ["CASE STUDY of Agency and Institutional Failures in Endangered Species Management of Florida Torreya"](#) that I authored and posted a few months ago. Thank you.

With hopes for friendly and progressive collaboration,
Connie Barlow, [bio and publications](#)