

"Ethics debate sends tremors through USGS" reads the headline over a story in the Nov. 3, 1989 issue of **Science**, describing the confrontation between Howard Wilshire, a USGS geologist, and the federal agency for which he works as a scientist. Wilshire's passionate interest in defending arid lands from the onslaught of off-road vehicles let him, as a private citizen, to advise (on his own time) an environmental group trying to prevent the USFS from building a playground for motorcyclists in California's El Dorado NF. He even suggested at one time that the group subpoena him as a USGS expert, though federal employees are not allowed to testify as experts against the government.

"The case highlights a problem that is likely to arise again and again for scientists in public service," writes **Science** author Eliot Marshall. "Because of their expertise, they may have – or believe they have – the best insight into a scientific issue that has become embroiled in public debate. But if their view happens to clash with the position taken by responsible officials, they face some difficult choices: they may keep silent, speak out at risk of punishment, or resign. The middle option is perhaps the most satisfying, but also the trickiest to negotiate, for the rules are always changing."

In this case, Wilshire's boss tried to suspend him for misconduct – an action that was overturned. But the issue is an increasingly pertinent one, with one of the questions being "Should the public have access only to the information that an Administration wants to release?" (This question was posed by Brent Dalrymple, a colleague of Wilshires at the USGS office in Menlo Park, CA.