charged in 1978 with falsifying research data (see preceding story).

Consequently, the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, headed by Sen. Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah), undertook a three-month investigation and then held hearings on June 2 to study the question of mismanagement at NCI. Among other things, the committee heard from the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services, which had reviewed NCI contracting operations in 1978 and again in 1980, that the deficiencies they found had been largely ignored. The committee heard from a former NCI program manager who testified that the contract for the bioassay program is not properly structured for the critical job of determining relevance to humans of tests of suspected chemical carcinogens in lab animals. And the committee also heard the views of the Director of NCI — Vincent T. DeVita — on contracting inadequacies. DeVita defended his agency's $910,000 grant to Straus on the grounds that charges against Straus had not yet been proved. However, DeVita acknowledges the validity of many of the accusations against NCI — for instance, that there have been flaws in how new contracts are developed and how old ones are changed or phased out because scientific staff at the Institute have viewed management of the contract much as they have that of the grant (a mechanism more familiar to them) and because insufficient staff have been allocated to the management of contracts. DeVita then said: "I pledge we will in fact do a better job."

In fact, DeVita claimed that NCI has already been attempting, since last year, to correct some of the contracting problems that surfaced during the hearings. For instance: "We established a two-tiered system for overview of contracts by independent groups of experts drawn from outside the federal government. This system includes concept review and technical review and is consistent for all of the Institute's research and resources contracts .... In addition to concept and technical review, Presidentially-appointed members of the National Cancer Advisory Board are kept informed of concept review decisions .... Further, my staff and I periodically review all of the Institute's contracts to assure that they are needed, properly classified and appropriately funded. Our current overview system now is a dual review of contracts — concept and technical merit — each conducted by separate groups of non-NCI experts. Total program overview is by the NCAB and the NCI Director and his staff."

But as a spokesman for the Senate committee told SCIENCE NEWS, "We want to see the proof of it" and will give NCI 90 days to provide evidence that this is really the case. If the committee is not satisfied after 90 days that NCI is shaping up, then the committee will hold more hearings on the matter. □

Endangered species: Redefining harm

Last week the Interior Department proposed changing the definition of harm under Section 9 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Lawyers within the agency contend that the move would clear up ambiguities and have no economic, biological or legal repercussions. But a number of biologists and economists within both that agency and environmental watchdog groups are challenging the assertion. They claim instead that the move could drastically weaken endangered-species protection by wiping out criminal prosecution of individuals who destroy the critical habitat of a species listed as endangered.

The issue is no small one; ESA's drafters maintained that the principal threat to an endangered species is destruction of its habitat.

ESA prohibits the taking of an endangered species and defines "take" to mean harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, collect or to attempt to engage in any conduct. "Harm," in turn, has been defined as any act or omission that injures or kills wildlife, including those that annoy a species to the point of disrupting essential behavior such as breeding, feeding or sheltering. Environmental changes causing such effects are also termed harmful. But the new proposal would eliminate environmental modification or degradation as evidence of harm.

"It's just one more step in a carefully orchestrated program to gut the [Endangered Species] Act," asserts Peter Holmes, with Defenders of Wildlife. "I don't want to sound alarmist about it," he says, but adds that Interior Secretary James Watt told the endangered species program manager that he was in favor of the program as long as it wasn't used to stop construction projects. And more than anything else, Holmes says, that's what critical-habitat designations do.

Several environmental groups will fight the proposed move, if necessary with litigation. They are also fighting several other recent actions the agency has taken that they see as weakening endangered-species protection. □

Rechargeable pain relief

Johns Hopkins Univ.

Implanted electrical devices to stimulate nerves and thus relieve intractable pain have been in use for a few years, but they've either been supplied by an external power device that a patient wears, or contain a battery that wears out in a year or two, requiring the patient to undergo surgery to have a new device implanted. Now a rechargeable electronic device that pain patients can wear indefinitely has been designed by Donlin Long and Robert E. Fischell of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Donald S. Friedman of the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md., and Alfred E. Mann and Joseph H. Schulman of Pacesetter Systems in Sylmar, Calif. It is called a Human Tissue Stimulator. The HTS is similar in design to the special nickel-cadmium batteries present in spacecraft. A patient can recharge it weekly by holding a coil next to the area where the HTS is implanted. The coil provides an alternating magnetic field that recharges the HTS. Pictured here are a patient, Larry Herrington, who has had an HTS implanted under his left arm since March to provide pain relief, and Long. Long is operating the hand-held controller that Herrington himself usually uses to turn the HTS on and off. (The controller is not the same as the coil that Herrington uses to recharge the HTS.) A computer is used to program the pulse width, amplitude and frequency of the electrical output of the HTS.