The White House has said that a vast, left-wing network is radicalizing people and inciting violence across America. There is no evidence to support this. But the allegation could provide a pretext for investigating and harassing many progressive groups, environmental groups among them. This remains uncertain, but there are clearly grounds for concern.

Environmental groups are not oblivious to the threat. Environmental organizations are beginning to take precautionary steps against potential investigation and attack by the Trump Administration. *E&E News* reported last week that some groups are taking precautions like getting burner phones for international trips, strengthening office security, and using encrypted communications.

I doubt that environmental groups are at the top of the White House enemies list. But it's not paranoid for them to be worried. After all, the Administration has already publicly tried to destroy law firms it accuses of representing the wrong clients and causes.

There are more specific reasons to worry that environmental organizations could be targeted. A report by a group with close White House ties singles out Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters, 350.org, the Sunrise Movement, the Center for Biological Diversity and NextGen Climate. Another report specifically identifies the Sunrise Movement as part of a network advocating political violence. It says something about the quality of these reports that one leader describes them as "documenting a lot of smoke." (Or maybe it should be, "blowing a lot of smoke.")

At a meeting, Trump instructed agencies to investigate the allegations in these two reports.. Trump himself has identified state climate policies as threats to "our Nation's core national defense and security needs" that "devastate the prosperity of … the entire United States population." That seems to make groups advocating climate action into national security threats. He has also repeatedly denounced "environmental extremists."

A Trump directive makes it clear that the target of the investigations— "domestic terrorism" — is defined very broadly. Although purportedly aimed only at politically motivated violence, domestic terrorism may also include campaigns of "radicalization" and "isolating and dehumanizing specific targets" through "in-person meetings, … social media, and even educational institutions." The culprits are described in ideological terms: They cast "support for law enforcement and border control" as fascist; they are "anti-Americanism, anti-Capitalism, and anti-

Christianity"; and they embrace "extremism on migration, race, and gender." In other words, advocating leftwing views makes an organization suspect of directly or indirectly fomenting violence.

The directive calls for agencies to investigate the supposed leftwing network with the same tools used against organized crime. In addition, it specifically threatens to eliminate tax exempt status. The goal is to "disband and uproot networks, entities, and organizations" subject to the order.

The White House's reference to a "vast network" rings a historical bell. A mid-century speaker famously decried "a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man." That speaker was Joe McCarthy. Environmental groups weren't active during his time, but does anyone doubt that they would have been on his hit list?

Maybe what we've seen from the White House will turn out to be smoke rather than fire, with little real world impact. I wish we could be confident of that. But given what we've already seen from this Administration, we certainly can't rule out a serious attack on environmental organizations among others. Even identifying specific organizations as possible targets for investigation could do them serious harm, scaring away donors, members, and staff. Witches may not be real, but witch hunts leave very real havoc in their wake.