



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

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To: State Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Secretary, Department of Natural Resources
of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico
Governor of Guam
Governor of U.S. Virgin Islands
Governor of American Samoa
Governor of Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Mayor of the District of Columbia

The purpose of this letter to is to provide guidance for future Wildlife Action Plan (Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy) review and revisions.

Congress required that all States commit to reviewing and, if necessary, revising their Wildlife Action Plans within 10 years. Every State made this commitment.

The attached document, drafted by a State and Federal team, identifies the process and requirements that all States must use for the future review and revision of their Wildlife Action Plans. This guidance provides a flexible framework for States to incorporate new information and changing circumstances into their Wildlife Action Plans as easily as possible while providing national consistency.

The Wildlife Action Plans are monumental achievements. We are very encouraged by the early successes and cooperation they have spawned. We hope that this guidance will help to ensure that these excellent plans are a guiding force for conservation for years and even decades to come.

Sincerely,

Dale Hall
Director of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Edward Parker
President of the Association of
Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Enclosure

**Guidance for Wildlife Action Plan
(Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy)
Review and Revisions**

Purpose-

The purpose of this document is to identify the process and requirements that all States/territories must utilize for the future review and revision of their Wildlife Action Plans (Action Plans).

Introduction-

The Action Plans were developed by the States to be dynamic, adaptive documents that would guide agency and partner conservation planning for years to come. Each State committed to reviewing or, if necessary, revising (review/revise) their Action Plan within 10 years as per Element 6 of the original legislation. Many States committed to do so at much shorter intervals.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), encourages States to review and revise their plans as often as is useful to them and their partners. Recent Congressional report language indicates that Congress expects the USFWS to develop guidance/standards that will be utilized by all States/territories to revise their action plans. The Congress also expects that USFWS will apply the standards consistently in all Regions. (cf. Senate Report 109-275: Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2007. House Report 109-465: Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2007). This guidance document will ensure national consistency while allowing States and their partners flexibility to update their Action Plans without undue burden.

Review Process-

Original plan review, with approval recommendations to the Director of the USFWS was provided by a National Advisory Acceptance Team (NAAT) -- the Assistant Director of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration, each of the seven USFWS Assistant

Regional Directors for Migratory Birds and State Programs (ARD), Assistant Manager (AM) of the California/Nevada Office, a representative State Director from each regional Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), and a representative of the national AFWA organization.

Although a NAAT may be reconvened in the future to consider general policy matters or particularly complex review/revision issues, it is not anticipated that a NAAT will evaluate Action Plan review/revisions. Instead, that task will be accomplished by Regional Review Teams (RRTs). The RRTs were an integral part of the original Action Plan evaluation process and we feel that future evaluations of Action Plan review/revisions will be carried out more effectively using this regional approach. There will be eight RRTs, one within each FWS region. The RRTs are comprised of one ARD, AM or equivalent; and one State Director appointed by each of the four regional associations (e.g. Southeastern, Midwest, Northeast, and Western). State Directors serving on RRTs will not evaluate the Action Plan from their own agency. In such cases, the Action Plan would be sent to another RRT for review. Federal Assistance Program and State staff may assist the RRTs as necessary. RRTs will assist States with guidance on Action Plan revisions and be available for any Action Plan related issues that may arise

General Requirements-

All States must review/revise their Action Plans by October 1, 2015, or the date specified in their original, approved Action Plan and send the updated version and summary documentation to the USFWS. This summary documentation must demonstrate that the entire Action Plan was examined and that all of the original Eight Required Elements (attached) were met, including an up-to-date public review process specified in Elements 7 and 8. If no changes were made, the State must document and explain why no changes were necessary and what process was used to make that determination. For more details, see **Section A**. Once Action Plan review/revisions are approved, States are not obligated to review/revise their Action Plans for another 10 years or until a date specified in the Action Plan.

A State may also revise only a part of its Action Plan without reviewing/revising its entire Action Plan. Some Action Plan revisions, including but not limited to the addition of a species, are defined as “major” (see definition on page 5). As such, States

must provide documentation that demonstrates all of the original Eight Required Elements are adequately addressed, including an up-to-date public review process as specified in Elements 7 and 8. “Major” revisions must follow the requirements outlined in **Section B**. All other revisions are considered “minor” and must follow the requirements outlined in **Section C**.

Specific Requirements-

Section A.

Requirements for Planned Review/Revision of Entire Plan

- (1) State agency director notifies its Regional USFWS Federal Assistance office by letter of intent to review or revise the Action Plan.
- (2) State and USFWS meet to discuss guidance to ensure all elements will be addressed prior to submission of documentation and reviewed/revise Action Plan.
- (3) State submits reviewed/revise Action Plan package by October 1, 2015, or the date specified in its original, approved Action Plan to the Regional Federal Assistance office.

This package will include:

- summary of any significant changes and documentation describing how the current version of Action Plan adequately addresses the Required Eight Elements, including an up-to-date public review process specified in Elements 7 and 8;
 - “Road map” (summary of location of elements in document) to locate revisions in Action Plan.
- (4) States are encouraged to post an electronic version of their most recent Action Plan on the web along with the summary of significant changes and “road map.”
 - (5) RRT reviews Action Plan with input from Federal Assistance staff and determines whether it is approvable or not approvable. The ARD or AM will send a letter to the State Director with documentation of the decision and description of any required action if the Action Plan is not approvable. State

Directors can appeal to the Regional Director.

- (6) ARDs and AM are responsible for communicating significant issues with members of all the RRTs to ensure consistency among RRTs.
- (7) States that specified a review/revision within 10 years (prior to the October 1, 2015, deadline) in their Action Plan and wish to change that date must submit a “minor” revision letter (see **Section C** below) to their Regional Federal Assistance office.
- (8) Federal Assistance must track revisions and due dates and maintain an administrative record of Action Plan revisions.

Section B.

Requirements for “Major” Revisions **Prior** to the Planned Review/Revision Date

- (1) State agency director notifies its Regional FWS Federal Assistance office by letter of intent to make “major” revisions to the Action Plan (See definition below).
- (2) State submits modified Action Plan and includes:
 - summary of all significant revisions;
 - documentation describing how the revision meets the Required Eight Elements, including an up-to-date public review process specified in Elements 7 and 8;
 - “road map” to locate revisions in Action Plan.
- (3) States are encouraged to post an electronic version of their most recent Action Plan on the Web with the summary of significant changes and “road map.”
- (4) RRT reviews Action Plan with input from Federal Assistance staff and determines whether it is approvable or not approvable. The ARD or AM will send a letter to the State Director with documentation of the decision and description of any required action if the Action Plan is not approvable. State Directors can appeal to the Regional Director.

- (5) ARDs and AM are responsible for communicating significant issues with members of all the RRTs to ensure consistency among RRTs.
- (6) Federal Assistance must track these revisions and maintain an administrative record of Action Plan revisions.

Section C.

Requirements for “Minor” Revisions Prior to the Planned Review/Revision Date

- (1) State Director notifies the Regional FWS Federal Assistance office by letter of intent to make minor revisions with a description of the change and why the change is considered a minor revision.
- (2) State submits letter that includes:
 - summary of all revisions;
 - “road map” to locate revisions in Action Plan.
- (3) States are encouraged to post an electronic version of their most recent Action Plan on the web along with the summary of significant changes and “road map” (summary of location of elements in document).
- (4) Federal Assistance must track these revisions and maintain an administrative record of Action Plan revisions.

Definitions

“Major”: A significant change or changes that requires revision of two or more elements in the Action Plan. Any addition of a species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) would be a major revision. This is considered a major revision because it would require the State to substantially address subsequent elements (i.e., habitats, threats, actions). Similarly, a revision of its threat assessments for SGCN species and/or habitats that are essential to conservation of SGCN would be a major change because it would likely result in changes to conservation actions and prioritization of those conservation actions.

“Minor”: All revisions not considered “major.” .

The RRT will determine if a change is minor or major when it is unclear. This decision may be requested by either the State or staff of Federal Assistance. State Directors can appeal decisions to the Regional Director.

Note that States and other eligible jurisdictions that wish to use State Wildlife Grant (SWG) funds to address critical priority issues not identified within an Action Plan should refer to the USFWS *2007 Administrative Guidelines for State Wildlife Grants* (SWG Guidelines), *Section X.H.*

Eight Required Elements
State Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies

1. the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as each State fish and wildlife agency deemed appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of wildlife of the State; (In subsequent discussions, these species were referred to as Species of Greatest Conservation Need or SGCN.)
2. the location and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to the conservation of each State's SGCN;
3. the problems which may adversely affect SGCN or their habitats, and priority research and surveys needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of SGCN and their habitats;
4. the actions necessary to conserve SGCN and their habitats and establishes priorities for implementing such conservation actions;
5. the provisions for periodic monitoring of SGCN and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of conservation actions, and for adapting conservation actions as appropriate to respond to new information or changing conditions;
6. each State's provisions to review its Strategy at intervals not to exceed ten years;
7. each State's provisions for coordination during the development, implementation, review, and revision of its Strategy with Federal, State, and local agencies and Indian Tribes that manage significant areas of land or water within the State, or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of species or their habitats; and
8. each State's provisions to provide the necessary public participation in the development, revision, and implementation of its Strategy.