

State Wildlife Action Plan Revisions

PRESENTATION



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NOTES

Notes on August 24, 2015 Webinar on SWAP Revisions – RRT members and supporting staff

Webinar offered by WSFR Headquarters:

Tom Busiahn, Christy Vigfusson, Paul Van Ryzin

Attendees:

R1: Karla Drewsen, Kathy Hollar, Rita Dixon (ID)

R3: Jessica Piispanen, Jim Hodgson, Mark Reiter (IN)

R4: Mary Pfaffko (GA), John Ambrose (GA)

R5: Dee Blanton, Colleen Sculley, Patricia Riexinger (NY), Chris Burkett (VA), David Whitehurst (VA)

R6: Amanda Horvath, Steve Jose

R7: Trent Liebich, Matt Kirchoff (AK), Travis Booms (AK)

R8: Bart Prose, Marie Strassburger, Chris Tomlinson (NV)

Slide 1: Title slide

Slide 2: Introduction. We did not record the webinar since we chose not to use VOIP on the webinar to limit technical issues. However, we are making written notes available, to accompany the slide show. This includes notes on the slides and also on the general discussion at the end of the webinar/call.

Slide 3: Tom Busiahn welcomes and introduces attendees, and reviews the call agenda.

Slide 4: SWG was preceded by the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) introduced in 1999 by Don Young which ultimately failed and was not passed. It did however aid in passage of the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program which amended the Wildlife Restoration Act. It created the WCRP (Program and Account) with funding of \$50 million, and only funded for one year. It did however retain a permanent authorization which continues today. Paul also notes that since SWG doesn't have a permanent authorization, WSFR didn't create an administrative rule like we have for other WSFR programs. Therefore, we need to rely on various WSFR, Service and joint Service-AFWA guidance in administration of the program. We are trying to remain consistent with past policy documents, as described in this presentation.

Slide 5: Key principles of the WCRP program that carried over into the SWG program include the term "species of greatest conservation need" or SGCN, the concept that States have authority to develop their own list of SGCN independent of the Service, and the five-year timeframe for submission of the first version of the Plans in 2005.

Slide 6: WCRP legislation first itemized the "eight elements" to be included in the Plans.

Slide 7: Key point in this slide is that SWG adopted the WCRP language to require the eight elements.

Slide 8: The Service published a list of Q&As in 2002 as interim guidance for administration of SWG. Q&A number 1 from this document suggests that submission (or commitment to submit) was the operative requirement for States to be able to use SWG funds in 2002. We are adopting this principle with the revision of the plans in 2015, as you'll see later in our presentation.

Slide 9: The Service Director signed the 2006 administrative guidelines which superseded and replaced the 2002 Q&A document. This document defines the process of 'conditional approval' that some RRTs and states have used and/or will use in the 2015 revision process. If the link doesn't work you may need a FAWiki login, or ask your Regional coordinator for an electronic copy of this older guideline for SWG.

Slide 10: The key language in the 2007 Guidance relevant to today is a "flexible framework". The Service has tried hard to maintain national consistency while giving Regions and states as much flexibility as possible.

Slide 11: The 2007 Guidance also defined our regional approach in reviewing the 2015 Plans. The guidance gives the makeup of RRTs, with appointment of State Directors to the RRTs by the regional associations.

Slide 12: The 2006 SWG administrative guidelines on conditional approval, plus this passage from the 2007 Guidance, define the process for conditional approval. Service ARD sends a letter to the State Director describing required changes (if the plan is not approvable). State Directors can appeal to Regional Director. State has six months from receipt of letter to complete the changes as recommended by the RRT.

Slide 13: Where to find the 2007 Guidance. Again, if you can't access the FAWiki please ask your Regional coordinator with WSFR for this document.

Slide 14: AFWA published the Best Practices document in 2012 with support from States and input from WSFR personnel.

Slide 15: The 2015 revisions are showing strong adoption of many of the voluntary recommendations from the Best Practices document.

Slide 16: WSFR published "frequently asked questions" based on Q&As presented in July at AFWA's conference on SWAPs. They are available on FAwiki.fws.gov. Ask your Regional WSFR SWG Coordinator if you don't have access to the wiki.

Slide 17: We have been hearing that as many as 10 states may come in with their revisions after the 2015 deadline. Therefore, we developed the following policy framework, based on input from AFWA, Regional SWG staff, HQ personnel.

Slide 18: Tom Busiahn reviews information in the table giving a draft policy formulation. Based on the call response in which there are no objections posed, we suggest you may share the table as a draft policy. WSFR will work in the next two weeks to obtain Service HQ approval as necessary, but we don't expect significant changes. WSFR will share the final approved policy as soon as it is signed by leadership.

Slide 19: This slide covers what you should include in your letter to your RRT, IF you expect to miss the deadline. A letter to the RRT will help the RRT plan its SWAP review workload.

Slide 20: This slide covers what your ARD or equivalent should do to respond to the State letter noting the deadline will be missed. Send a written acknowledgment, copy WSFR HQ so we can anticipate and stay informed, and if warranted the ARD can refer to the final approved table that will be released as soon as leadership signs off on it (expected by mid-September 2015).

Slide 21: This slide restates the conditional approval procedure described earlier in this presentation, and covers issues of eligibility for FY 2016 and FY 2017 funds.

Slide 22: Consistent with the 2002 guidance Q&A's, WSFR will allow States to use SWG to address newly-added SGCN before Plan approval.

The submission of the Plan is the defining event. Plan approval is only necessary for States to use 2017 SWG funds.

Slide 23: Tom notes that we are proposing some flexibility with respect to the July 1, 2017 deadline for use of FY 2016 SWG funds. SWG funding is available for two years, so technically FY 2016 funds are available through the end of the next fiscal year (to September 30, 2017), however Regions need some time to process grants and so we are recommending the July 1, 2017 final deadline. Check with your Region if necessary.

Slide 24: This slide covers FY 2017 SWG funds. Eligibility for these funds requires approval of the Plan by the Service Director.

Slide 25: Self-explanatory.

Slide 26: Contact information for WSFR HQ staff.

Notes on General Discussion following presentation:

Question on late submission. I need to SUBMIT the plan by Feb. 19, 2016, in order to be eligible for FY 2016 Competitive SWG, correct? Yes, submission and not approval is the requirement to be eligible for FY 2016 Comp SWG.

Question on timeline for RRT review. Comment from one Region, that we saw the RRT review process take about 90 days, but this was for plans that were submitted well before the October 2015 deadline. It could take significantly longer in some Regions, due to the workload when multiple plans are submitted by October 2015. A Regional WSFR chief notes that in their Region, they are handling Plan revisions on a first-in, first-out basis. Also keep in mind that WSFR Headquarters needs to review RRT recommendations, and obtain approval from Hannibal Bolton and the Service Director Dan Ashe, which adds additional time.

Request is made for Hannibal to bring the proposed or finalized policy framework for late submission to the Teaming With Wildlife Committee session at the AFWA annual meeting in September. Tom affirms we will do that.

Question: can I share this policy framework with states? Tom notes that the beginning part of the presentation is based on earlier, approved guidance and so that can be freely shared without any caveats. As for the table, that is being proposed as a policy framework and it has not yet been approved and signed by Service leadership. We don't expect changes, but if you need to share the proposed table and policy you may do so, as long as you acknowledge it is a draft policy. WSFR will share the final version of the table and new Q&As by letter to the State Directors.

WSFR staff ask for any other comments or questions about Plan revision.

Question from an RRT member on how the RRTs decide if the Plans are adequate and complete. Answer is that the Plans must address the "eight elements". WSFR Headquarters and Region staff affirm that the "sub-elements" developed by the NAAT during the original plan reviews are still being used to help guide the thought process for working through the revisions. However, the sub-elements are not required in any official Service policy or anything jointly approved by the Service and AFWA.

Question from an RRT member on how climate change is being addressed. Answer is that AFWA did a survey in 2014 which showed that 45 or more States are or will address climate change in their 2015 revisions. The RRT member notes she is chair of the climate change committee for AFWA and wants to facilitate inclusion of climate science as much as possible in the revisions.

One State notes they are working closely with their Climate Science Center to adopt climate adaptation strategies into the Plan.

Question about whether there is lots of verbal back-and-forth between the State and the RRT. Answer is yes, there is, and we encourage as much of that as necessary to keep lines of communication open. Some Regions are offering teleconferences, some face-to-face meetings, some offer both. Stay in touch with RRT members often and early, along with supporting staff. The RRT member contact information is included in the SWAP revision Q&A document available on the FAWiki (or ask your WSFR Regional coordinator for a copy).

Is there interest in a regular SWAP revision teleconference/webinar? Three responses are in the affirmative, so decision is made to offer regular calls/webinars. We will try to hold the next conference call/webinar before the end of September; WSFR HQ will send out a date, time, link and call number in the next few weeks. The time will be later in the day to accommodate people in the far western time zones. We'll take notes and share afterward, if you are unable to attend.