

**Fish & Wildlife Service – National Conservation Training Center
Critical Writing/Critical Thinking Follow-up Web Series
Develop a Writing Collaborative**

Speakers:

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MB: Really excited to share this information with you today on collaborative writing. This is just a great session. I found so much fabulous information about collaborative writing, and I had a really good time talking with a number of you about your experiences about what works and what doesn't work in the FWS today.

I think you're going to be surprised at what you're already doing that constitutes collaborative writing. And I hope that I have some tools that I can offer you that can streamline that process, make it a little more efficient, make it a lot more enjoyable, and make the product at the end of the day a lot more productive.

So let's jump right in! I guess the first thing we need to do is define what we mean when we're talking about collaborative writing. There's a handout that is available on the Sharepoint site. And I relied very heavily in preparing for today's session on a research that was conducted by Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede. They are two composition theorists that were working out of Southern Illinois University at the time. This was in 1986. They got a national grant to study collaborative writing processes across the country.

They looked at 7 different disciplines. They looked at engineers, clinical psychologists, educational researchers, a sanitation department in California, a chemist working with the USDA. So they looked at this huge range of professions to try to figure out what is collaborative writing, how is it being done, what works, what doesn't work. And their work was published in a book called *Singular Texts / Plural Authors*. And I relied very heavily on what they found in addition to discussions I had with FWS personnel.

So this list that's on your handout and I think I have a copy of that here. So there are 7 different categories of behavior that they identified that qualify as collaborative writing. They're arranged here from the most collaborative to the least. At the most collaborative, you have a team that comes together, plans the project, outlines the document. Each member of the team drafts a part of the document. The team compiles all the parts, revises the whole thing.

Your seeing some of this happening in the FWS now. Right now it's happening it's happening in a linear or what Kristi Young described as a serial process. So for example on a petition to list the species, this team is located in different offices. And you might have a few conference calls. Very rarely does the team all get together as a whole during

the brainstorming stage or during the outlining stage. And some of you, like Nathan Allen in the Austin office, are trying to make this a more team-based effort, where you do get together at those early stages to brainstorm and outline together. And we'll talk today about how to do that.

But you'll notice that all the way down at the bottom of the list, that still constitutes collaborative writing, is one person dictates, another person transcribes and revises as they transcribe. So even if you're in a meeting with the solicitor's office and they provide you some feedback about, this is how we need to address some of the legal concerns, that's a collaborative writing process as well. A lot of what you're already doing is collaborative writing. You may not have seen it that way in the past, but that's what it is.

So these definitions, take a look at them and see how much of what you're already doing constitutes collaborative writing.

Another point that Lunsford and Ede brought up, and that I'd like to address just at the start of today's discussion is this idea that we have in our culture that writing is something has to be done alone, that the author is someone who sits at a desk by him- or herself and out of his or her own brain finds words to put on the page and composes this masterpiece. This is such a prevalent idea in our culture, and it comes from a lot of different sources. I started thinking of examples of this, and I'm thinking of creative writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote the book *Self-Reliance*, or Henry David Thoreau, who retreated to Walden Pond where he wrote his masterpiece. Emily Dickinson who from her attic, practically, with no social interaction composes these fabulous poems.

And I started thinking, well, where are the examples of authors who wrote differently than that? And I was shocked at how quickly I began coming up with this huge list of authors who wrote in the collaborative writing style that Lunsford and Ede identified. Just to give you a few of those examples.

Homer, the greatest poet in the Western world, the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the twin epics of Western literature. If he existed at all, he was illiterate. He composed his poetry orally. He taught it to poets called rhapsodes who then recited it for hundreds of years before it was written down by scribes. That's a collaborative writing process.

The picture that you have in front of you is of Virginia Woolf and her infamous Bloomsbury Group. This is a group of intellectuals that she gathered together to meet on a regular basis. Some of them even lived with one another. They talked about the current issues of their day, about history, philosophy, and she and her husband began a printing press where they started publishing novels, poetry, and works of philosophy by these authors. The quote at the top of the page is hers: *Masterpieces are not single and solitary births. They are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.*

When I started outlining today's presentation, and later today we're going to talk about the 6 stages in the writing cycle, when I got the writing part, I actually wrote in my notes, *must be done alone*. And after I thought of these examples, I scratched that out. And I'd like to

encourage you as scientists to ask yourselves the question why? Why does that have to be done alone? Why can you not write in conversation with other scientists and researchers?

In order for that to happen, two things have to occur. Number one, we have to be in conversation with other scientists and researchers. Number two, those conversations need to be recorded. So as you collaborate with others, take notes, whether you're doing so using a tape recorder, whether you're taking notes on your lap top, or whether you're scribbling in a notebook, get that language down so that you can use it in your draft. But let me encourage you to start thinking of that collaborative writing process as really that, collaborative writing.

Also on the handout for today, and again, just to set the stage for our conversation, there were two quotes in the Lunsford and Ede text that I thought very powerfully illustrate the difference between collaborative writing projects and non-collaborative writing projects, or collaborative writing projects that work and collaborative writing projects that don't work.

In this first one, this group of authors that you see listed, from Mary Field Belenky to Jill Mattuck Tarule were responsible for in 1997 publishing this book, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. It was a text that they researched and wrote collaboratively. And in the beginning, in the introduction to this book, they talked about how the style was inconsistent, and they recognized that. But in the middle of this quote, where you see the dashes, after those dashes, you see, *but we learned to listen to each other, build on each other's insights, and eventually to arrive at a way of communicating as a collective what we believe*. And I think that's a very powerful statement of what a collaborative writing project can be when it's done well.

As a contrast, take a look at the second page of your handout. You'll see an example of what a collaborative writing project can be when it's done poorly. *A Kinsey Institute sex survey that could help researchers understand how AIDS spreads was delayed for almost a decade because two of its authors fought over whose name should appear first on the title page*. I think those two quotes illustrate starkly the kinds of writing processes we want to be involved in and the kinds we don't.

So with that to set the stage for today's discussion, I want to talk about some of the benefits, and I want to talk honestly about some of the drawbacks of working in a collaborative writing situation. Before I do that, I want to hear from you about what some of your experiences have been. I've already heard some of these, so I kind of know what the preview is going to be. But in the chat feature, you can choose to do this to all of the panelists, or you can choose to send your chat only to Karene or to myself, and we'll read those anonymously, so we don't have to know where they came from. But share with us what kind of collaborative experiences have you had. Have they been positive or negative? What has been good about the collaborative writing experiences? What has been bad about the collaborative writing experiences?

Particularly focus on those two questions. What has been good about the collaborative writing experiences you have had? Go ahead and put those answers in the chat box. What has been good about the collaborative writing experiences you've had?

KM: And if you'd rather not use the chat, you can raise your hand, and we'll let you unmute your phone. I think that's a good idea too.

MB: I'm seeing *a broader range of ideas*. I'm also seeing, *seeing different styles of writing*. *More insight from the larger group*. *And greater consensus*.

Now let's talk about some of the things that have been bad. What are some of the bad experiences that you've had working on a collaborative writing project?

Time is a big concern. It's slower. It's more time-consuming. Again, on the good side, the collaborative processes seem to work best when there's a leader, when there's one person who takes leadership, consensus, edits to streamline. When there's too many cooks and no real leader, no one to say that's enough.

It's a challenge when there are more opinions and viewpoints to balance, when you can't agree. It can be combative if everyone isn't looking for the best outcome, and consensus is hard.

Sometimes something simple can get bogged down in bureaucratic language.

So your experiences have been mixed, and that's fair. Let's talk about those pros and cons a little bit. I have been a big proponent of the fact that a pro to writing, one of the things that I find powerful about the written word is the individual ego. A piece of writing has a personality invested in it, and that's powerful, because the person behind it invests that with their best work, their quality, and they put their passion in it. If you think about the Martin Luther King letter from last time, he wanted that to be his best piece of work. He was passionate about his cause, and you could feel that in his writing.

But at the same time, if you think about any of the speeches that Hitler delivered in Germany in the 1930's, those speeches were infused with his passions too, and those passions were filled with bias and hatred. So that's also a con of how that one ego, that one person who's so invested in that process of writing. Having a group means that if that one person has a biased opinion it can get flushed out in that group process.

I list this under pros of the single writing process—solitary, male, competitive, and majority. Especially for people who are introverted, writing alone tends to be more comfortable. But what composition theorists discovered when women and minorities entered the university in the 60's and the 70's after the Civil Rights Movement was that many females and minorities feel more comfortable working in teams, working collaboratively, and working cooperatively, that these are more natural ways for women and minorities to work. That has changed over the last 30 years. So there's still some truth to that, but not as much as there was 30 years ago.

Cognitive processes. We all know that as we articulate something, we figure out what we wanted to say. We clarify our ideas as we say them. And Lunsford and Ede asked their respondents about this. What happens when you have a thought, and you're not really clear, and you start to follow it to the end? What happens when you're in a collaborative writing group. A clinical psychologist named Albert Bernstein said this, *when I am writing alone I always visualize an audience, but I hear my own experiences. ... It's kind of a closed loop—there's no input from anyone else. When I'm working with other people there are several things that I must keep in mind: not just what the audience might say but what the person I'm working with is going to think of this line. And how to get the job done, how to get around some of the difficulties. ... When I write with someone else I am engaging not just in a dialogue with the reader but with that other person. And I think it makes the result much better—unless I'm writing with too big a group, with a room full of picky people. ... Working with someone else gives you another point of view. There is an extra voice inside your head; that can make a lot of difference. Others can see things about what I am doing or what I am saying that I can't see. And if they are good and we work well together, we can do that for each other.*

So that's a pro about working collaboratively, but an educational researcher named Eleanor Chiogioji said, *when I'm engaged in that kind of give-and-take in a group setting, I don't have the leisure to follow my own line of reasoning as far as I want to. And that can disturb me. I like to see where my thoughts would lead.* So there are pros and cons to that.

Time is something that a number of people mentioned. And what's odd is that a lot of people think that collaborative writing projects take longer, but studies show that they are more efficient. So Lunsford and Ede tried to figure out where that dichotomy came from. It may be that staff are being brought into the writing process earlier, and for the first time, they're seeing brainstorming and outlining and researching as part of the writing process. So there's a perception that it takes longer.

It could also be that there's a loss of control over your personal time. When meetings are being scheduled and conference calls, and you're forced to attend those things. The nice thing about that is that managers can compensate for that perception. Managers can motivate their staff by rewarding them for time that they spend on the project, allowing them sufficient time to spend on the project, and the team leader on the project needs to associate each of those meetings with a clearly defined product. And that will help to minimize those frustrations. We'll talk about those products in just a moment.

Finally, collaborative writing projects are by their nature just bigger than other writing projects, and they do take more time. So that's one reason why they're conceived as more time consuming, when actually they're often more time efficient.

Collaborative writing projects can capitalize on the strengths of an organization. As you mentioned, they also get bogged down on the bureaucracy. George Irving, who is a chemist with the American Institute of Chemists—he was formerly the research director of the USDA—he spent 12 years in cooperation with the FDA trying to clarify the impact that certain chemicals have in the food chain and when they could be allowed in the food

chain before they were considered dangerous and before labeling had to occur. A huge project. He basically said *if you presume you know enough to answer all questions, then you don't need an organization, but if you have an organization, you better use it*, which I think is a nice, succinct way of putting it.

I think probably best of all, collaborative writing is a fabulous training tool. Younger staff members are sometimes better researchers and writers because they're closer to the university and they've had more intense practice doing that. They're often better at new technology than some of the older staff. The older staff are certainly better at policy, they're more accustomed with how things work, and they've got the technical know-how. A collaborative writing project is a completely organic way for those two groups of staff members to train one another without any loss of efficiency to the organization. There's no artificial setting time aside to train staff. It's very organic and natural.

There are really three kinds of collaborative writing projects, and I'm going to get some weigh-in from some folks that I've spoken to here to describe these three kinds. The first one, I'd like to get Alissa to fill us in her on some of her experience. So Alissa if you could unmute yourself. Would you talk to us about when you have a big project and you need a lot of hands to get it done.

AS: We've done that a couple of times where we've had big projects and short timelines and staff have worked together to get that done. People take different pieces of it, and I think the product ends up really good. I think it's stressful for some people to go through that process, but I think the product, we have been able to put the product out quicker than we would otherwise, and I think it's really helpful by having people think through the product they're developing together and see it from different angles. And there's several people, at least three on the call who have been involved in one of these. So if one of them feels comfortable talking about their experience, I welcome them joining in too.

MB: Nathan, have you been involved in something similar, a divide-and-conquer experience?

NA: Yeah. Similar to what Alissa was talking about. We've done that in our office. I think from my perspective it worked out pretty well. You feel like you're going to accomplish a lot in a short amount of time because you know you're not going to have to take the whole thing on yourself, is some of the positives. It is a challenge to make sure you're all talking about things in the same way.

You get in too big a hurry and you go write about different things from slightly different perspectives then it can goof things up, so there has to be some regular and routine communication among the team as you're making those micro decisions about how you're approaching certain things to make sure that's going to be consistent through the different pieces. But yeah, we've had pretty good success I think trying to do that.

MB: Excellent. Anybody else want to weigh in with their experience on the divide-and-conquer approach.

AS: Michelle, this is Alissa again. I will add that one of the difficulties we run into, and this made get into that point you made about it's helpful to have someone leading the group, just the process of deciding who's going to do what, and whose role it is to do which piece. Sometimes that can be a little rough sometimes.

MB: Good.

The third one here, I'm going to skip expertise for a moment, and I'm going to skip ahead to consensus. Consensus is a unique type of collaborative project. Think of working with the UN. A consensus collaboration is kind of a high level vision statement, mission statement, problem resolution. You need to get buy-in from a variety of different interest groups, whether they be inside an organization or among different organizations. And so there's a high degree of diplomacy required to make a consensus project work. Kristi, would you mind unmuting yourself and talking about your experience with a consensus collaborative?

KY: Hello everyone. I am on one of the national teams looking at possible modifications to the ESA regulations. I think Deborah you're on the call and you're on one of those teams too. This is a consensus approach, or a group approach. We do have a leader, but I don't think the leader has been given that much authority beyond being an organizer of the meetings and the conference calls. Doesn't have the authority to say this is good, this is where we're going, and we're going to move forward now.

The framework of the group is frequent conference calls. When we were really working hard at it, it was twice a week. We would meet for a couple of hours on a conference call. We tried to use some technologies, looking at sharing documents on the web, things like that, but that didn't always work because people had various levels of technological expertise, and also just what they had in their own offices and whether they could, like doing a webinar like this.

The advantages of that is when we were on the calls, I enjoyed the synergy and debating the finer points of the ESA. Maybe that just makes me a nerd, but it was really fun. And coming up with the right words to use.

The downside to that process though was you came up with a structure to the document together, and then everybody would go off and make their edits to it, and then you'd look at that, and somebody else would make edits to it, and then somebody else would make edits to it, and we don't ever seem to be getting anywhere with a final product, because somebody always has some other way of saying this is the way we want to say that.

So the advantages are you really get a lot of interesting insights, expertise, experience, particularly in a high level group like that. You've got a lot of fairly high level folks on the teams, and people who have had decades of experience working in this field. Downsides are you never can seem to get resolution things without somebody who can really step in and leader / facilitator is somebody who I think would be really useful in that kind of process.

MB: Thanks Kristi. That is a project that requires diplomacy. And it's a tough one to find. The reason that I skipped the middle one, expertise, is because that's the one that all of you are involved in on a daily basis.

The expertise collaboration happens when you are listing a species, when you get a petition to list a species. That's the example that I'm going to use today, but anything from a CCP to a Refuge Management Plan to a Biological Opinion to a Section 7 Consultation, you have various people who have to weigh in on the document because they are the field biologist and they know the taxonomy, or because they're the section 7 expert and they know the law, because they're the solicitor and they know the legal issues, because they're the Regional Director and it's their job.

So all of these people are called into the process because it's their expertise. And right now that process is happening in a kind of linear or serial fashion. We're going to talk about how to make that a more collaborative process. We're going to begin with my favorite tool, the Writing Cycle. I'm going to give you some general suggestions about how to pull a team together and what to do at which stage of the writing cycle, and then I'm going to show you a sample spreadsheet for a very small writing project, which is a petition to list an endangered species that is declined due to insufficient information.

So let's run through the writing cycle first. At the brainstorming stage, you want to get together all the people who will be involved in the project from writing the initial draft to signing off on the final draft. It is especially important that the reviewers are involved in this initial brainstorming conversation. That does not mean they have to be there for the whole time, but it does mean that they need to weigh in on the final decision, and that they need to know the broad strokes of why that decision is being made. How are we going to get there?

The goal of any brainstorming meeting should be to make a schedule, and to assign different responsibilities. So the spreadsheet that I'm about to show you is the product that should arise out of these brainstorming meetings, in addition to research notes and initial outlines.

At the arranging stage, most of your documents already have a template that you should be using. For the detailed sections of the argument, you need the expert to come in and weigh in on how that section will be arranged. But you can make assignments based on the template as a whole. Together brainstorm an outline. So the whole team needs to brainstorm the outline for the argument of the document. And then each section of the template needs to be assigned to different people who will do the research and the writing.

Now remember our discussion from earlier. That doesn't mean that the research and the writing have to be done in solitude. That can be done with 2-3 people. So when you make those assignments, if it's an introverted person who prefers to work alone, they can, but it doesn't have to be that way.

In the selection, use the template and decide which sections are and are not necessary. Determine where additional information is necessary. You may have to go back to the brainstorming stage and gather additional information in order to make the argument. If that happens, revise your spreadsheet, make additional assignments, and add deadlines as appropriate.

To keep the writing on track, use your team to schedule writing times. Have competitions among the team members on things like word count or page count to keep people motivated. Keep tabs on one another through email or other forms of social media. Have live or virtual coffee breaks together. Chat with one another either online or on the telephone about what you've gotten done, where you're stuck, what you've accomplished.

Managers, see these as teaching opportunities. Use this time to train your staff. Whether you're doing that yourself or whether you're having members of the team doing that. See this as training time, and build that training into the collaborative project. If you have staff members who need writing help, partner them up with stronger writers. If you have staff members who need technological assistance, partner them up with strong tech people.

At the revising stage, before you start sending that document up the chain, switch it with peers. The reviewers on the project need to be very open to two things. Number one, they need to be open about accepting work before it's done. As I understand the process right now, reviewers will very rarely look at a document before it's finished, and that's part of what is causing some of the efficiency and some of the demoralizing effects inside of the service. There's a lot of pressure on lower staff level people to get a document in perfect shape before sending it up the line, and that's not realistic. To counter that, reviewers need to say, I'll look at a draft.

But at the same time, there can be a tendency on a collaborative writing project for the writers to delay the process of writing by getting too much feedback, so the reviewers also need to put their foot down and say, I'm not looking at another draft until you get past this hurdle. So reviewers need to be really skilled at knowing when to accept a draft and when to refuse a draft. And that skill will only come with time and practice.

For substantive edits, get experts to look at pieces of documents instead of having to review the whole thing. And you can allay their fears by giving them a timeline and saying, you'll have a chance to look at the entire document in March. This is February, and I only need you to look at this piece of the argument. Tell me if it's sound, and then we'll move on. And you may get some resistance to that at the beginning, but try to work through that.

And finally, at the editing stage, and we went through this on the webinar on effective editing, it's a good idea to get 3 sets of people to divide up the copy editing work. You want one set of people to look at the prose text. You want one set of people to review the tables and figures. And you want one set of people to look at the literature referenced. Among all three of those, you can have multiple people who are divvying up the work. So you can have 5 people working on the prose, each person is taking 50 pages. You can

have 2 people looking at the tables and figures. Each person is taking 15 tables, for examples.

But you should have one master administrator who's keeping track of the documents, who's keeping all the text clean, who's keeping all the folders in order, so that there's consistency among all the final edits.

Any questions about those quick notes before we go through a sample spreadsheet? You can make these out loud.

KM: Michelle, this is Karene. I'm just really interested in all the ways up front that reviewers can look for ways to improve the quality of writing before it hits their desk by being involved in those early stages. It might even have opportunity there in the early stages for coaching and looking at other examples of writing in the office that were good or something like that.

MB: I know Kristi does a lot of that, right? Kristi tries to have an initial kick-off call with field office, regional office, solicitor and Washington office.

KY: We call it our team approach, try to get everybody on the same page. However, we don't have something written down like you're showing here, the spreadsheet. There's no written product at the end of that call. I think each of us independently are coming away from that call with the roles and responsibilities. This does seem like a more formal but sometimes a necessary step to have everything really articulated of who's doing what and when.

MB: Anybody else have suggestions on how to get reviewers on there at an earlier stage?

NA: Yeah Michelle. This is Nathan. I was thinking about that. You made a really good point about reviewers learning the balance of when to accept or not, predrafting. And I think it's a challenge for writers too, figuring out when is the right time to get that early feedback. There's nothing more frustrating than trying to review something that the language and the text is so bad you just can't make sense of it.

There's a stage there where you haven't even developed it enough to get the feedback. I think as writers it's a learning process, but hopefully if you're working with the same people over time, that can start to make sense. At first, you might get something that isn't ready. I can't understand, I can't follow the thought process enough here yet. Let's figure out where you're going. You might have to back up to an outline to figure out where they're going.

But I think there's a balance on both sides of that. How to get that early feedback and where.

MB: You're right. That's tough to learn.

AS: I'd like to comment on that too. We've tried to have kick-off meetings on things like critical habitat packages. And part of the difficulty is sometimes it's such a complex topic you're dealing with. If you're trying to brainstorm and make sure you're in agreement at all levels on what the final answer is and where you're going to draw the line. There's so much detail and background and information that you have to know, but sometimes it's hard to get that much of people's time, reviewers further up the chain, to delve enough into the details to be able to think through the answers. So sometimes I wonder when is the appropriate point and if we should think through it a little more before we try to bring them in on it.

KY: This is Kristi. Particularly with something complex like a large critical habitat rule, you have an initial kickoff call, and that gives you the broad outline, and then as you go through the process of developing your analysis, issues are going to come up. And if you're leading an effort, trying to get those people at the various levels, and sometimes some side group, not really in the direct chain that's going to be reviewing the document, getting those people on the call or at least to participate, give us an email, or something, does become very challenging, but I think it's very important to recognize those moments and say, let's stop, let's get everybody together again, let's talk this out, and then before anybody wastes their time writing any further, let's get this worked out first.

MB: That's great feedback. I think the key is getting the experience and trying it a different way. Seeing how that works and ironing out the wrinkles, but getting on board, like the people who are on this call, who are willing to try it a little bit differently and see what works and what doesn't out of that slightly different approach.

We're going to run about 15 minutes over. Karene is that okay?

KM: Sure, Michelle.

MB: Okay. Let's go ahead and run through an example of how this would work. You folks know I don't know all the people involved, so under the persons involved, I probably have some of the wrong people listed here. And I've probably missed some of the steps, but you can make revisions to this, and I just hope that you see the point of designing a spreadsheet kind of this way and that you can tailor it to yourself.

Down the left hand side of the spreadsheet, I've got the 6 stages of the writing cycle, starting with Brainstorming and ending with Editing. On your own screens, at the bottom of the screen, there's a dropdown box with a percentage where you can see how large you want to see the spreadsheet. At 75%, you can see the whole thing in your window. You can scroll up and down on page one, and I'll move us to page two when we're ready.

So on brainstorming, and I used this example from Kristi where she has that first initial call with everybody from the solicitor in Washington all the way down to the field biologist. Under *task*, everybody needs to read the petition. And the *person responsible* is the person responsible for the product. This is the product that is going to come out of this task. And you'll see that each task on the spreadsheet has a clearly defined product. And it is a written product. It's not make a decision. It's not schedule another conference call.

It's not work out the analysis. There is a written product that will come out of every single step on this spreadsheet. That's important.

This written product is individual to each of the people involved. We're not going to check to see that they've done it. It's probably going to go into the administrative record, I would imagine. Each of these people should read the petition, and they should come to this conference call with their notes. Are we going to pursue the petition, decline the petition, and why? What are we most concerned about?

The actual conference call will be held on January 15th. This is under arranging. You'll notice under place and materials, I have Regional Director provide conference line. Regional staff coordinate schedules by email. So this is all the things that have to happen before that conference call. Kristi, you were talking about technology and the difficulties in getting Web-Ex or Live Meeting. So under place and materials, if someone needs to travel, if someone needs a piece of technology, a conference call line, or a software program, it goes under place and materials.

On this January 15th conference call, under the product, the Field Biologist is going to be responsible for producing meeting notes. So he knows before he even attends this conference call that he's going to take notes of what everyone says, he's going to outline the main points, and email it to all parties involved.

The next stage is that the Field Biologist and the regional staff are going to meet together and outline the first draft. They're going to email it to the Regional Director and whoever else, I have solicitor, for their information. If there's additional research to be conducted, assign field biologists and regional staff as appropriate. And here's where I said under selecting, this spreadsheet may have to be revised. If we discover that additional research has to be conducted, we might have to make additional assignments, pull other staff onto the project, add deadlines, and change the spreadsheet.

Now I'm going to move into the writing phase. I've given one week to the field biologists and the regional staff to draft a decision and share it with each other. The first stage of revision is for those two, the two writers, to revise the draft that they wrote, and then deliver it to the Regional Director. So before they share it with a supervisor, they should share it with each other and have a crack at revising it.

The second stage under revising is that the regional office revises it and sends it on to Washington. The third stage at revising is that Washington checks it and sends it back. And you're probably all laughing at this right now because I know it's streamlined and that's not at all what the process looks like, but that's the ideal. The editing process, you're going to have regional staff who are going to copyedit it.

Does this spreadsheet make sense? What kinds of comments do you have about it? What kinds of questions do you have?

AS: I have a question. When you're talking about revising the decision, are you talking about a write-up of the summary of what the answer's going to be, or are you talking about the whole big document?

MB: I'm talking about the document. That's an important point, Alissa. The decision needs to be made here at the brainstorming stage. And brainstorming is all the way down to, it's these first two steps, 1-1, and 1-15. The decision of whether to pursue this petition or decline this petition will be made on this initial phone call with all of these people. And we are not going to change that decision along the way.

If we do change that decision, then we have to scrap this spreadsheet, and go back to the brainstorming stage.

KY: We need to be flexible in what we're calling the brainstorming. The initial conversation, a brainstorming session, may have a qualified agreement on what is the decision. And then as the staff are flushing out the information and articulating the arguments, you may need to revisit those and have check-in points and make sure everyone is still in agreement. As we get more information, your answer may change.

MB: If that's the case, then you need to change the writing session to brainstorming, and you need to break down those pieces of what you're calling "flushing out the argument." What are they flushing out? Are they researching?

KY: In some cases, yeah. I won't go into the policy framework of a 90-day finding, but if they need to find more information, or look into the references further, or as things are written, what was clear. Or maybe some other bit of information that was not part of the initial discussions comes to light, and so you need to revisit it.

Example being, one situation we've got now that during the 90-day finding, we thought there was a guy cited in a petition that claimed to be a species expert. We took that at face value. Now that we're looking at the status review for the species, we're finding out that this guy is a complete hoax.

MB: So in this case, what we need to do under the brainstorming, we need to expand that. And we need to say also under brainstorming, conduct literature review. Conduct expert analysis. And break down the research that needs to be conducted.

NA: I think you're right Michelle. You're getting at some of the nuances of how this would be more practical to us. And I think there's a couple of different scales of big decision-making. And then there's a whole bunch of little decision-making within how we're framing these arguments that's going to go into the document. So there is a scale at which you have a kick-off meeting and there might be a lot of people involved and say, this is what we think the decision is going to be. And everybody says, okay that's good.

But then there's a lot of discussion back and forth that will at times look like brainstorming where you're trying to sort out particular arguments and verify particular pieces of information and facts, whether to include it or not, how to address it, how to apply policy in

this instance, that happens at the lower level, at the staff level, but still maybe 3-4-5 people depending on how that particular project is going.

And I think one of the things you pointed out here a couple of times that I think has got to be key for us is documenting even those little decisions, that we're not always real good at. And where it really burns us is you make a little decision on an argument as a small group, you move forward, and 3 weeks or 3 months have gone by, and now someone's questioning that, and you're revisiting that one, and you don't have the documentation anywhere that says, why did we do that again? And hopefully somebody can remember. Maybe they will, or maybe they won't.

I think the hard part is trying to figure out and the appropriate level of documenting those things throughout. And I'll be quiet. Thanks.

MB: Thanks Nathan. Alissa?

AS: This conversation is reminding me of when we had the critical writing class here in October and a lot of times we're doing analysis by writing. We haven't fully done our analysis ahead of time. We're thinking through it as we're writing the document.

MB: And I think here's the answer to that. Brainstorming involves a lot of writing. One method of brainstorming is drafting. But when I talk about writing, what I mean is actually crafting the document. You have an outline that is a topic sentence outline. And you craft paragraph by paragraph your argument. Anything where you are researching, you're investigating arguments, you're doing the literature references, looking at the experts, that is brainstorming. And during that process, you should be doing a lot of writing.

A lot of the writing that you do during brainstorming, will enter the document verbatim, especially if you do it well. But those processes need to be listed on the spreadsheet under brainstorming and they need to be accounted for individually and they need to be accountable. They need to be given to people with deadlines and with products associated.

KM: So I think you both make a really great point, and I think one of the things we say in the class that oftentimes biologists will hand in their brainstorming and they'll call it their final draft. And there's still some underdeveloped analysis there. But if we as a reviewer understand we're getting an early draft of this somewhat arranged brainstorming notes, then it's taken differently maybe, if I understand what Michelle is trying to tell us at the top of the hour here.

MB: Excellent.

So the last thing that I wanted to talk about today is the manager's role in the collaborative writing process. And I think that we probably don't have time to talk about that in any detail. There's just one highlight that I want to touch on, and that's number three under the managerial role. There does need to be a clear leader in the collaborative writing process, someone who takes charge for establishing the deadlines and

negotiating the logistics of the meeting, but under number three, managers should provide the time and the resources for the group to evolve their own norms of conduct and negotiate their own authorities and responsibilities.

In facilitating such negotiations, managers and teams should consider four areas of authority. This comes from Lunsford and Ede, and they put this in terms of teachers within the classroom. I changed this to managers within an organization. What they're really trying to say is in a collaborative writing situation, in an ideal situation, leaders will emerge at various stages within the project based on different factors. First, there will be someone who is recognized within the group as a natural leader, and that may or may not be the manager within the group. And the manager needs to accept and even facilitate that in order to streamline the project.

There may also be someone who is, and this will change, the best biologist, so they are the leader within the profession. But then at a later point in time, there may be someone who is the best section 7 person. So the leader within the profession will change over the course of the collaborative writing project. And the manager should recognize and may need to even say at some point, oh yeah, Bill was the biologist in charge, but now Ellen, she's really the section 7 person, so I need to let her take the reigns now.

Within the task as appropriate is somebody who really knows how to work Live Meeting and is great at that. For that moment, for that day, they might become the leader on the team. And then you might have someone who's a great writer, and when it comes to the writing of the document, they need to emerge as the leaders.

So managers allowing those people to come forward at various stages within the group, that's a skill that really Karene has a lot more that she can say on, and there are a lot of resources out there about how to facilitate those leadership roles. But just be aware that leadership roles can and should shift in a collaborative writing project, and these are some of the types of leadership that you may see.

One final thought before we leave today. This comes from the engineer that Lunsford and Ede talked to. His advice was *listen ultra intensely. Don't let your feelings get hurt by criticism. Don't hesitate to ask questions or change styles. And be verbose. It's always easier to erase than to go back and reconstruct original thought processes.* With that final word, Karene, I'm going to hand it back over to you.

KM: Thank you Michelle. I like that. Always be verbose. Some of us thought we didn't need to be, we thought we needed to be concise in ourselves. Thank you all so much for being here today. Have a safe and healthy and happy holiday season. And Michelle thank you so much.