



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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Memorandum

Regional Directors, Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7
Manager, California/Nevada Operations Office

Director *A. Dale Hall*

Subject: Web-based Information, Planning, and Consultation System

In today's atmosphere of declining resources, the Service needs to develop methods of better engaging action agencies to get them more actively involved in the consultation process. This can help to achieve one of the primary intents of section 7: to create a program of "interagency cooperation." Embracing this concept, the Service is taking on the role of assisting action agencies in meeting their section 7 responsibilities rather than regulating them in the process. This requires action agencies to take on more of the responsibility to meet their legal obligations. To assist them in taking on this increased responsibility, the Service is developing methods of providing action agencies and project proponents with the information they need to weigh the consequences of their project designs and to make conservation-related design decisions as early in the design process as possible when there is the maximum design flexibility.

As part of this effort and as part of our work on the Pipeline Safety Improvement Act Interagency Committee supporting the White House Energy Task Force, the Service has agreed to assist in the development of a web-based system intended to expedite section 7 consultation. This system will allow project proponents to obtain species lists, species ecological information, bibliographic references, recommended conservation measures for incorporation into project designs (i.e., best management practices), and Service contact information via the internet. It will also notify Service offices of upcoming project activities allowing for better workload planning, and provide Service personnel with information regarding existing natural resources, completed and planned activities, protected habitats, and priority resource areas across the landscape and in and around proposed project locations.

Development of this system is essential to the Service's ability to meet the increasing demands on the consultation program. In an effort to accelerate development of the system, the Washington Office is working with several action agencies and the Council on Environmental Quality to secure resources for both the computer work and the effort needed to develop the information that will populate the system. In the first phase of development, we are working to complete the portion of the system that will automate the species-list process. We realize that

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some offices have already completed this process. Consequently, if desired, the national system will link to pre-existing systems to minimize the level of additional effort required of these offices. The first phase of system development also includes the development of the best management practices that can be incorporated into project designs to avoid, minimize, and mitigate the potential impacts of proposed actions. The Branches of Consultation and Habitat Conservation and Recovery and Delisting have drafted guidance for the development of conservation strategies that will be circulated for Regional comment soon. This guidance will assist in the development of BMPs.

Limited resources have been secured to begin work in certain priority areas identified by the Office of Pipeline Safety. In addition, we are anticipating additional resources from the United States Customs and Border Protection Service as well as others. As resources continue to be secured the Washington Office's Branch of Consultation and Habitat Conservation will be contacting regional offices to coordinate needed activities. I would like to emphasize that this is a high priority for the Service and ask that you make every effort to support regional and field office participation. We will be working with your staff contacts on assignments and deadlines as well as providing funds when available to complete the needed activities. If you have any questions regarding this effort, please contact Michael Horton of the Branch of Consultation and Habitat Conservation at (703) 358-2371.