

## **Fish and Aquatic Conservation (FAC) Program 2016-2020 Strategic Plan Questions and Answers**

**Question: What are the major differences between the new FAC Strategic Plan (Plan) and the previous strategic plan?**

**Answer:** The new Plan is built around seven core goals:

1. Conserve aquatic species.
2. Conserve, restore and enhance aquatic habitats.
3. Manage aquatic invasive species.
4. Fulfill tribal trust and subsistence responsibilities.
5. Enhance recreational fishing and other public uses of aquatic resources.
6. Increase staffing levels, technical capabilities and natural and physical assets to fully meet our mission.
7. Educate and engage the public and our partners to advance our conservation mission.

The most significant difference between this Plan and the previous version is that Goal 5 has been redrafted to focus exclusively on enhancing recreational fishing and other public uses of aquatic resources, and Goal 7 has been added to focus on educating and engaging the public and our partners in advancing our conservation mission. These changes were made in response to comments we received from various individuals and organizations during the draft review process.

**Question: How should regional management develop well-crafted, approvable, annual operation plans?**

**Answer:** The Plan will serve as a foundation for the development and implementation of annual operational plans by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Headquarters and Regional staff, using a template developed by the national FAC leadership team. The Plan identifies seven interdependent goals, each representing a fundamental theme critical to accomplishing the mission of the FAC Program. Each goal of the new Plan contains specific objectives and related strategies to address those challenges and achieve measurable conservation successes.

**Question: Does the new Plan differ from the previous strategic plan in its support of recreational fishing?**

**Answer:** As reflected in the new Plan, the Service remains committed to enhancing recreational fishing and other public uses of aquatic resources. The FAC Program will continue to use its national network of facilities to provide and promote opportunities for the public to go fishing and participate in other aquatic outdoor recreational activities. Fishing depends upon healthy aquatic resources and can also help create and sustain a lifelong interest in stewardship of the natural environment.

**Question: How will the new Plan help the Service communicate with and engage Native American tribes to better fulfill our tribal commitments?**

**Answer:** One of the Plan’s seven core goals is to: “fulfill tribal trust and subsistence responsibilities”. This goal has three key objectives: (1) Promote a full understanding of the scope and importance of the FAC Program’s roles in meeting tribal trust fish and wildlife conservation obligations; (2) Develop and maintain effective relationships between the Service and federally recognized tribes; and (3) Deliver tribal trust fish and wildlife conservation and manage subsistence uses of fishery resources.

**Question: How will the new Plan address habitat loss, fragmentation and/or degradation within the habitat goals?**

**Answer:** One of the Plan’s seven core goals is to: “conserve, restore and enhance aquatic habitats”. This goal has three key objectives : (1) Develop landscape-scale habitat conservation strategies using the Service’s Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) Framework; (2) Conserve, restore and enhance habitats using available FAC tools; and (3) Work with federal, tribal, state and other partners to implement additional actions to achieve landscape-scale habitat conservation objectives.

The Plan specifically cites habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation as the primary factor contributing to the decline of native species. The plan also cites additional contributing factors to habitat loss such as point and nonpoint-source pollution, growing urbanization and climate change.

**Question: Who commented on the Plan?**

**Answer:** In August 2014, a public comment period for the draft Plan was announced on the FAC Program’s website. Comments were received from various individuals and organizations, including the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, eight U.S. states, seven federally recognized Tribal entities, Service staff, the American Fisheries Society, Trout Unlimited, the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council, National Fisheries Friends Partnership, National Fish Habitat Partnership, the Booth Society, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

**Question: How will the Plan help the Service support and promote recreational fishing within the United States?**

**Answer:** One of the Plan’s seven core goals is to: “enhance recreational fishing and other public uses of aquatic resources.” This goal has three key objectives: (1) Leverage other FAC goals to conserve, restore and enhance aquatic species and their habitats, control invasive species, and fulfill tribal trust and subsistence responsibilities to maintain and increase the productivity of our nation’s fishery resources; (2) Use the National Fish Hatchery System to conserve, restore and enhance fishery resources and other aquatic species; and (3) Increase recreational fishing and other public uses and enjoyment of aquatic resources.

The Plan recognizes recreational fishing is a part of our national heritage and is a major contributor to the nation's economy. It also acknowledges that fishing opportunities hinge on FAC's ability to conserve aquatic ecosystems that in turn can sustain healthy and abundant fish populations. The new Plan also notes that one of the ways the Service helps maintain recreational fisheries is by stocking fish to mitigate the impacts of federal water projects.

**Question: Will the new Plan adequately address wildlife management assistance to military installations under the Sikes Act?**

**Answer:** U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) installations function as islands of biodiversity and provide new opportunities for landscape-scale conservation. By joining in the common cause for more effective fish and wildlife management, both the Service and DOD have been able to achieve much more in recent years than they otherwise would have alone. The FAC Program will emphasize its role in partnering with the military services and may expand its efforts as new resources become available.

The new Plan addresses wildlife management assistance to military installations under the Sikes Act under Goal 2 of the plan, "conserve, restore and enhance aquatic habitats." The three objectives to help FAC conserve, restore and enhance aquatic habitats are: (1) Develop landscape-scale habitat conservation strategies using the Strategic Habitat Conservation Framework; (2) Conserve, restore and enhance habitats using FAC tools, including Sikes Act Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans to identify and deliver habitat conservation actions for high-priority aquatic and other species on DOD installations; and (3) Work with federal, tribal, state and other partners to implement additional actions to achieve landscape-scale habitat conservation objectives.

**Question: How will the new Plan help the Service engage youth in nature?**

**Answer:** As reflected in the Plan, a key educational component of a successful and innovative national aquatic conservation strategy must include engagement of America's youth in the enjoyment, understanding and stewardship of our waterways.

A new goal was added to the Plan to specifically address the importance of educating and engaging the public and our partners in advancing our conservation mission. This goal includes three key objectives: (1) Using communication tools to engage and educate the public in the Service's conservation mission; (2) Conducting hands-on community-based recreation and education programs to engage the public in outdoor recreational activities; and (3) Working with our partners to develop and implement a comprehensive and unified national public outreach and education strategy.