



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 memorandum is to provide guidance for future Wildlife Action Plan (Plan) review and revisions. It replaces similar guidance issued in a joint memorandum on July 12, 2007.

As a condition for receiving funding through the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Program, Congress required that all States, Territories and the District of Columbia commit to reviewing and, if necessary, revising their Plans on an interval of 10 years or less.

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

The Plans are monumental achievements aimed at conserving each State's fish and wildlife resources while also serving as building blocks for landscape conservation. We are very encouraged by the early successes and cooperation they have produced. We hope this guidance will help to ensure that these excellent Plans are a guiding force for conservation for years and even decades to come.

Sincerely,

Greg Sheehan  
Principal Deputy Director of the  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Virgil Moore  
President of the Association of  
Fish and Wildlife Agencies



Signed December 5, 2017

Enclosure



# Guidance for Wildlife Action Plan Review and Revision

## 1 PURPOSE

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The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to fish and wildlife agencies of U.S. States, commonwealths and territories, and the District of Columbia (hereafter States), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), on review and revision of State Wildlife Action Plans (Plans).

## 2 INTRODUCTION

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The Plans are adaptive documents that help guide State fish and wildlife planning and conservation. To keep the Plans current, each State commits to review and, if necessary, revise the Plan at least once every 10 years. This requirement is consistent with the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program enacting legislation<sup>1</sup> where the Eight Required Elements (Elements) of a Plan are mandated (see Section 8). The Service encourages States to review and revise their Plans as often as is useful to them and their partners.

Congress expects the Service to provide guidance and standards that will be used by all States to revise their Plans. Congress also expects the Service to apply standards consistently across all Service Regions. This guidance document will ensure national consistency while allowing States and their partners the flexibility to update their Plans as necessary.

## 3 REGIONAL REVIEW TEAMS

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Review of Comprehensive and Major Revisions to the Plans are conducted by Regional Review Teams (RRTs). There is at least one RRT in each Service Region, typically composed of an Assistant Regional Director (ARD) or a Regional Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) Chief, and one State Director appointed by each of the four regional Associations of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Midwest, Northeast, Southeastern, and Western). Although RRT members may designate one or more staff assistants, Plan revision documentation must be signed by the original RRT member. State Directors serving on RRTs will not evaluate a Plan from his or her own agency; therefore, a proxy State RRT member or

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<sup>1</sup> See [p. 114 STAT. 2762A-118, Title IX, Sec. 901, Public Law 106-553—Appendix B.](#)

another RRT may be asked to evaluate the Plan. WSFR and State staff assist the RRTs as necessary. Minor Revisions do not require review by a RRT.

## 4 GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

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All States must conduct a Comprehensive Review and, if necessary, revision at a maximum interval of 10 years beginning on October 1, 2015, or by the date specified in the State's most recently approved Plan if before this date. States must notify the Service Region of their intent to revise the Plan, regardless of whether the anticipated revision is Comprehensive, Major, or Minor. States also must ensure that the Service Region has on file the most current version of the Plan. The Service Regions should communicate, coordinate, and resolve significant issues with members of all RRTs to ensure consistency among Regions. The sections below describe specific procedural requirements for the three revision types.

## 5 SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

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### 5.1 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVIEW/REVISION

A Comprehensive Review/Revision is a review of the entire Plan content and supporting materials. Comprehensive reviews are mandatory and must occur at least every 10 years. Each State must send the updated version of its Plan and summary documentation to the Service Region by the deadline. Summary documentation must show that the entire Plan was reviewed and that all Elements (see Section 8) were addressed, 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 describe the process used to make that determination. Steps for completing a Comprehensive Plan Review/Revision are:

- 5.1.1 The State Director notifies the Service Region (ARD or WSFR Chief or designee) by letter of intent to conduct a Comprehensive Review/Revision of the Plan. The letter should provide an expected timeframe for completion of the Comprehensive Review/Revision.
- 5.1.2 Early in the process, State and Service Region discuss the approach to ensure all Elements will be addressed. This may be accomplished via teleconference or in-person meeting.
- 5.1.3 The State Director submits the updated Plan package to the Service Region at a maximum interval of 10 years beginning October 1, 2015, or by the date specified in the State's most recent approved Plan if before this date. The package must include the following information as separate documents or as one combined document:
- Summary of significant changes
  - A "Road Map" that provides the locations of the Elements in the Plan, and describes how the current version of the Plan adequately addresses the Elements, including an up-to-date public review process specified in elements 7 and 8. The Road Map should include a table with page numbers noting where each of the Elements has been addressed.
- 5.1.4 The RRT reviews the Plan with input from WSFR and State staff and, following any dialogue between the parties, determines whether it meets the criteria to be approved or conditionally approved. If the RRT recommends that the Plan may be conditionally approved, the Service Region sends a conditional approval letter to the State with documentation of the decision and description of any action required. Plans that are conditionally approved must be revised and resubmitted to the RRT within six months of the date of the decision letter to the State. Appeals of RRT decisions may be made in writing by a State Director to the Regional Director.
- 5.1.5 Upon recommendation of approval of a Plan by the RRT, the Service Region forwards Plan review documentation through Service WSFR Headquarters recommending signature by the Service Director. The Service Director approves the Plan via letter to the State Director.
- 5.1.6 A State that wishes to change a Comprehensive Review schedule identified in its current Plan must submit a Minor Revision to the Service Region (see Section 5.3).

- 5.1.7 The Service Region tracks and maintains an administrative record of Plan revisions.
- 5.1.8 Each State is encouraged to post an electronic version of the revised Plan on its agency website along with the summary of significant changes and the “Road Map.”

## 5.2 MAJOR PLAN REVISION

A Major Revision is a significant change to the methods, criteria, or processes used to address any of the Elements in an approved Plan, which would require partner and public comment. Major Revisions are voluntary and can occur anytime at the discretion of the State. The RRT reviews all Major Revisions. See Section 7 for examples, or consult the Service Region for assistance.

- 5.2.1 The State Director notifies the Service Region by letter or email of intent to conduct a Major Revision. This notification must describe any anticipated change(s) to the methods, criteria, or processes used to address any of the Elements in the current Plan. The letter should also provide an expected timeframe for completion of the Major Revision.
- 5.2.2 The Service Region responds to the State via letter or email confirming or denying the Major Revision request. Appeals of the determination may be made in writing by a State Director to the Regional Director.
- 5.2.3 The State Director submits the modified Plan package to the Service Region. The package must include the following information as separate documents or as one combined document:
  - Summary of significant changes.
  - A “Road Map” that provides the locations of the Elements in the Plan, and describes how the current version of the Plan adequately addresses the Elements, including an up-to-date public review process specified in elements 7 and 8. The Road Map should include a table with page numbers noting where each of the Elements has been addressed.

- 5.2.4 The RRT reviews the Major Revision with input from WSFR and State staff and, following any dialogue between the parties, determines whether it meets the criteria to be approved or conditionally approved. If the RRT recommends that the Major Revision may be conditionally approved, the Service Region sends a conditional approval letter to the State with documentation of the decision and description of any action required. Conditional approvals must be addressed within six months of the date of the decision letter to the State. Appeals of RRT decisions may be made in writing by a State Director to the Regional Director.
- 5.2.5 Upon recommendation of approval of a Major Revision by the RRT, the Regional Director or designee approves the Major Revision via letter or email to the State Director or designee.
- 5.2.6 The Service Region tracks and maintains an administrative record of Plan revisions.
- 5.2.7 Each State is encouraged to post an electronic version of its most recent Plan on its agency website with the summary of significant changes and the “Road Map.”

### 5.3 MINOR PLAN REVISION

A Minor Revision is a change to a Plan that adheres to the methods, criteria, or processes used to address any of the Elements in the approved Plan. Note that clarifying edits, corrections to typographical errors, and/or similar revisions to improve readability do not require Service notification or approval. Minor Revisions are voluntary and can occur anytime at the discretion of the State. See Section 7 for examples or consult the Service Region for assistance.

- 5.3.1 The State notifies the Service Region by letter or email of intent to conduct a Minor Revision. This notification must describe anticipated changes being considered, and how the changes are consistent with the approved Plan, including references to the current Plan's existing methods, criteria, or processes. The letter should also provide an expected timeframe for completion of the Minor Revision. States are encouraged to batch and submit multiple Minor Revisions together in a single package.
- 5.3.2 The Service Region responds to the State via letter or email confirming or denying the Minor Revision request. If the Service Region determines the proposed change is a Major Revision, the Service Region informs the State that it must follow the Major Revision guidelines (see Section 5.2). Appeals of the determination may be made in writing by a State Director to the Regional Director.
- 5.3.3 The State submits to the Service Region an email or letter that includes a summary of the Minor Revisions and locations in the Plan.
- 5.3.4 The Service Region acknowledges receipt of the changes via letter or email to the State and tracks and maintains an administrative record of Plan revision.
- 5.3.5 Each State is encouraged to post an electronic version of its most recent Plan on its agency website.

## 6 DEFINITIONS

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### Comprehensive Review/Revision

A review of an entire Plan's content, and any supporting materials. Comprehensive reviews are mandatory and must occur at least every 10 years. This process must be summarized in documentation that demonstrates that the entire Plan was examined and that the required Elements 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.

### Director (Service, Regional, State)

Respectively, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Director of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [administrative region](#), or Director of a State, commonwealth, territory, or District of Columbia fish and wildlife agency.



### **Eight Required Elements**

The Eight Required Elements describe the required information in a Plan. The Elements were mandated in the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP) enacting legislation and were adopted for use in the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants (SWG) Program. The 2007 Guidance for Wildlife Action Plan Review Revision incorporated the Elements and was signed by the Service Director and the President of AFWA.

### **Major Revision**

A Major Revision is a significant change to the methods, criteria, or processes used to address any of the Eight Required Elements in the approved Plan, which would require partner and public comment. Major Revisions are voluntary and can occur anytime at the discretion of the State. The RRT reviews all Major Revisions. See Section 7 for examples, or consult the Service Region for assistance.

### **Minor revision**

A Minor Revision is a change to a Plan that adheres to the methods, criteria, or processes used to address any of the Eight Required Elements in the approved Plan. Clarifying edits, corrections to typographical errors, and/or similar revisions to improve readability do not require Service notification or approval. Minor Revisions are voluntary and can occur anytime at the discretion of the State. See Section 7 for examples or consult the Service Region for assistance.

### **Regional Review Team**

The Regional Review Team (RRT) is responsible for review of Comprehensive and Major Revisions. There is at least one RRT in each Service Region, typically composed of an Assistant Regional Director (ARD) or a Regional Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) Chief, and one State Director appointed by each of the four regional Associations of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Midwest, Northeast, Southeastern, and Western). Although RRT members may designate one or more staff assistants, Plan revision documentation must be signed by the original RRT member. State Directors serving on RRTs will not evaluate a Plan from his or her own agency; therefore, a proxy State RRT member or another RRT may be asked to evaluate the Plan. WSFR and State staff assist the RRTs as necessary. Minor Revisions do not require review by a RRT.

### **Road Map**

The Road Map is a document submitted as part of a Plan revision that provides the locations of the Eight Required Elements in the Plan, and describes how the current version of the Plan adequately addresses the Elements, including an up-to-date public review process specified in elements 7 and 8. The Road Map should include a table with page numbers noting where the Elements can be found.

### Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### Service Region

A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [administrative region](#).

### Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

A species identified, as each State fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, in an approved Plan. A SGCN may include any species of wild, free-ranging fauna including fish, and also fauna in captive breeding programs the object of which is to reintroduce individuals of a depleted indigenous species into its previously occupied range.

### State

U.S. State, territory, commonwealth, or District of Columbia fish and wildlife agency.

### Summary of Significant Changes

A document submitted as part of a Plan revision that contains a summary of any significant changes made to a Plan.

### Wildlife Action Plan

A Wildlife Action Plan is a State's comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy targeting conservation of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and their habitats, while also addressing the full array of wildlife and wildlife-related issues. Wildlife Action Plans address the Eight Required Elements mandated in the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP) enacting legislation which were adopted for use in the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Program. A Wildlife Action Plan may also be called a State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS), or other title at the discretion of the State.

### WSFR Chief

Chief of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program within each of the eight Service Regions.

### WSFR Regional Office

A WSFR office within a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [administrative region](#).

## 7 A GUIDE TO KEY DIFFERENCES AMONG PLAN REVISION TYPES

### DISTINGUISHING REVISION PROCESS CHARACTERISTICS

	<b>Comprehensive Review/Revision</b>	<b>Major Revision</b>	<b>Minor Revision</b>
Required every 10 years	✓		
Notify Service by letter of intent to revise Plan	✓		
State and Service Region discuss (via teleconference or in-person meeting) the approach to ensure all Elements will be addressed	✓		
Entire plan examined and all Elements addressed	✓		
RRT review	✓	✓	
Public review process	✓	✓	
Summary of significant changes	✓	✓	
Road map	✓	✓	
State Director submits updated Plan package	✓	✓	
Provide expected timeframe for completion of the revision	✓	✓	✓
Notify Service by letter <u>or email</u> of intent to revise Plan		✓	✓
Voluntary and at any time		✓	✓
State can appeal revision type determination		✓	✓

Designee may submit updated Plan package on behalf of State Director

Multiple minor revisions “batched” together and submitted as a single package

✓

✓

### DISTINGUISHING EXAMPLES OF PLAN MODIFICATIONS

	<b>Comprehensive Review/Revision</b>	<b>Major Revision</b>	<b>Minor Revision</b>
Entire Plan reviewed/modified, Elements addressed, and an up-to-date public review process conducted	✓		
Modify methods, criteria, or processes used to address <u>any</u> of the Elements in the approved Plan		✓	
Modify criteria and/or methodology for addition or removal of SGCN		✓	
Modify prioritization process		✓	
Modify threat assessment methodology		✓	
Implementation of new effectiveness monitoring and/or adaptive management scheme that differs from that in approved Plan		✓	
Modify comprehensive review schedule identified in approved Plan			✓
Modify SGCN list <u>based on existing methods, criteria and process</u> in approved Plan			✓
Modify SGCN distribution maps			✓

Modify Geographic Priority Areas/Conservation Opportunity Areas based on existing criteria and process in approved Plan	✓
Reassess threats for species/habitats by applying methods used in approved Plan	✓
Assess threats, identify new or revised actions and/or monitoring programs for species/habitats recently added to Plan following methodology used in approved Plan	✓
Update species nomenclature, taxonomic order, or status information	✓
Clarifying edits, grammar, and typographical fixes	Do not constitute any kind of revision

## 8 EIGHT REQUIRED ELEMENTS

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1. **SPECIES:** The distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as each State fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the State's Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN);
2. **HABITATS:** The location and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to the conservation of each State's SGCN;
3. **THREATS/STRESSORS:** The problems that may adversely affect SGCN or their habitats, and priority research and surveys needed to identify factors that may assist in restoration and improved conservation of SGCN and their habitats;
4. **ACTIONS:** The actions necessary to conserve SGCN and their habitats and the priorities for implementing such conservation actions;
5. **MONITORING:** 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. **REVIEW AND REVISION:** Each State's provisions to review its Plan at intervals not to exceed 10 years;
7. **PARTNER INVOLVEMENT:** Each State's provisions for coordination during the development, implementation, review, and revision of its Plan 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. **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:** Each State's provisions to provide the necessary public participation in the development, revision, and implementation of the Plan.

## 9 FLOWCHART OF REVISION PROCESS



