



WEB STANDARDS HANDBOOK

August 2007

PREPARED BY:
THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
WEB COUNCIL

Purpose of this Document

Over the past five years, the Fish and Wildlife Service (“Service” or “FWS”) has experienced dynamic growth in the number and complexity of Service Web sites, as well as in the number of visitors to those sites. At the same time, we face increasing Web content management and security requirements from OMB and the Department of the Interior, as well as demands for improved customer service from the public, that require a renewed commitment from Service programs and site managers to improve the delivery of information on the Web.

The Service is committed to delivering an Internet presence that provides clear, relevant, and accurate information to the public and key stakeholders using the most up-to-date and secure network and protocols. A professional Web presence significantly enhances our ability to meet the needs of our customers, communicate our resource management objectives, and to project a consistent identity—both to external audiences and within the agency.

As part of this effort, we must ensure that our Web sites comply with applicable laws and regulations. This Fish and Wildlife Service Web Standards Handbook builds on, and provides specific FWS guidance about, the Department of the Interior (DOI) Web Standards Handbook (386 DM 3). For ease of cross-referencing, the chapters and sections in this Handbook mirror the sections in the DOI Web Standards Handbook. For example, section 2.1.1 of this Handbook corresponds with section 2.1.1. of the DOI Handbook. For more information on any section in this handbook, refer to the corresponding section in the DOI Handbook. The Department Manual is available online at http://elips.doi.gov/app_DM/index.cfm?fuseaction=home. The Web Standards chapter is available on the intranet at https://intranet.fws.gov/region9/webpublish/standards/final_doi_web_standards.pdf.

This Service Web Standards Handbook applies to all public-facing (internet) Web pages; a separate standards handbook will address internal (intranet) pages.

Service Web site managers should follow the guidelines below and refer to the Department handbook for additional information. Please direct any questions to the Service’s Web Manager, David Yeargin (703) 358-2447, or your regional Web Council representative.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: FWS Organizational Roles and Responsibilities	page 4
Chapter 2: Requirements / Responsibilities Mandated by Federal Laws, Regulations, and Policies.....	page 6
Chapter 3: Identification (Authenticity and Branding)	page 12
Chapter 4: Standard Web Elements	page 14
Chapter 5: Customer Focus / Ease of Use	page 16

Chapter 1: FWS Organizational Roles and Responsibilities

1.1 FWS Web Council

The FWS Web Council oversees and guides all Service internet and intranet activities. It is chaired by the National Web Manager and is composed of one representative of each Assistant Director and each Regional Director as well as liaisons to the training, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and Information Technology (IT) communities. The Web Council charter has more information. The charter may be viewed on the intranet at <https://intranet.fws.gov/region9/webpublish/>.

1.2. Web Management

The National Web Manager in the Washington Office of External Affairs chairs the Web Council and represents the Service on the DOI Web Council along with an IT representative selected by the Service Chief Information Officer (CIO). Web Council representatives oversee Web management within their regions or Washington Office programs, and are the primary source of information and guidance for Web site managers throughout the Service. Web site managers should communicate regularly with their Web Council representative for current policy and guidance.

1.3 Web Governance Process

1.3.1 Registration

All FWS Web content, including Web sites and Web applications, must be registered through the online Internet Services Account Manager (ISAM) at <https://intranet.fws.gov/isam>. ISAM is an online tool that allows you to request Web, intranet and FTP accounts; request Web mailboxes and listserver accounts; apply for Web accounts with external users; maintain descriptive information about Web sites; add and remove Web managers; and access site usage reports. As a Web site manager, you are responsible for ensuring that information about your account(s) is correct and up-to-date.

Any site in which FWS employees are active contributors on behalf of the Service, even if that site is not hosted by the FWS, must be registered through ISAM. By “active contributors,” we include sites such as www.fishhabitat.org or www.grants.gov and other such “partnership” or collaborative sites in which we help create and maintain FWS-authored content, and exclude sites that post FWS content in the public domain (e.g. an FWS report or photo) without FWS participation. For more on partnership sites, see also section 2.1.4 in this Handbook.

If you want a non-FWS site hosted on an FWS server, you must first get the approval of the FWS CIO. Requesting the site through ISAM will ensure that the request will be directed to the CIO. The DOI CIO must also approve requests for top-level “.gov” domains (e.g., www.recreation.gov or www.fire.gov). You, as requestor, are responsible for any costs associated with the domain registration or hosting charges identified by

Information Resources and Technology Management (IRTM). You are also responsible for sponsoring any non-FWS personnel that will post content to the site.

Web applications must also be registered through ISAM. Web applications must meet Web security standards and follow any other IT investment guidelines. Speak with your Web Council representative for guidance.

1.3.2 Review and Approval of Requested Sites / Applications

Once you have submitted a request for a new Web account, your Service Web Council representative will receive an automated email notice. Your representative and the National Web Manager will either approve or deny your request. If your request is approved, you will get access to post your Web pages to the Web server housed at the Branch of Communication Technology in Denver. If your site request is denied, your Web Council representative or the National Web Manager will work with you to find a suitable alternative.

1.3.3 Annual Web Site Certification

If you are a Service Web site manager, you must conduct an annual review of your site and complete a Web site compliance certification form stating that the site complies with the requirements of this handbook and all relevant laws and regulations. Web Council members will manage the certification process with guidance from the National Web Manager. Forms and more information will be available on the intranet at <http://intranet.fws.gov/region9/webpublish/>

Chapter 2: Requirements / Responsibilities Mandated by Federal Laws, Regulations, and Policies

All FWS Web sites must comply with the laws and regulations described in the DOI Web Standards Handbook. Additional information and guidance follows.

2.1.1 Privacy Policy

Before you can ask for and collect personally-identifying information (e.g., names, phone numbers, driver's license numbers) beyond what is necessary to respond to an information request, you must receive approval from OMB and must follow any requirements that accompany their approval. For example, you may collect the name and address of a person in order to mail a requested brochure; but you may not collect that information as part of a permit application without OMB approval. If you are unsure whether you need OMB approval, contact the Service's Privacy Officer in the Division of Policy and Directives Management before you continue. See section 2.1.1.D.6 in the DOI Handbook for more on this.

The Privacy Act deals with collection, storage, and maintenance of personally-identifying information *either in paper or electronic form*. That collection may also be regulated by the Paperwork Reduction Act (see section 2.1.7). If you are collecting this information "non-electronically," i.e., through a form that is faxed or mailed in, you should consider ways to allow for electronic submission as well (see section 2.1.8); however, doing so may bring with it other requirements, such as completing an Exhibit 300, Certification and Assessment, Privacy Impact Assessment, System of Records Notice, and narrative statement. It is often more cost effective and secure to collect personal information through a non-electronic process and to keep those records in paper format, locked in files and disposed of in accordance with a records schedule—particularly for smaller projects. However even paper files will be subject to the requirements of the Privacy Act (system of records notice and narrative statement) if they are maintained by an identifier that is unique to the individual.

You may call the bureau Privacy Act Officer in the Division of Policy and Directives Management if you have questions. You may also speak with the Information Collections Officer for guidance and to determine if the information collection you are considering has already been approved by OMB (see section 2.1.7).

Required Links (Section 2.1.1.D.2-3 in the DOI Handbook)

Required links will be addressed in Chapter 4.

Web Sites for Use by Children (Section 2.1.1.D.4 in the DOI Handbook)

Web sites intended for significant use by children must display a prominent link to the DOI children's privacy statement at <http://www.doi.gov/chprivacy.html>. This link should be placed in the footer of the page if the page does not collect information from users, and should also be placed immediately before any information collection, as in this fictional example:

To get a copy of our *RefugeKids* activity book, please read our [children's privacy statement](#), then enter your email address in the form below.

If you are collecting additional information from children, you must follow the guidance in section 2.1.1.D.4.b in the DOI Web Standards Handbook.

Cookies (Section 2.1.1.D.5 in the DOI Handbook)

You may not use persistent cookies on your site without first getting approval from the DOI CIO. Speak with your Web Council representative for guidance. You may use “session” cookies but are not encouraged to do so unless they are needed for the site to function.

Privacy Policy (Section 2.1.1.D.7 in the DOI Handbook)

If your Web site collects information, you need to provide site users with your privacy policy (which is developed as part of the OMB approval process) in “machine-readable” (also known “P3P”) form. Speak with your Web Council representative for guidance.

2.1.2 Digital Rights, Copyright, Trademark, Patent Laws

Whenever possible, you should use FWS content first, then look to other content you are sure is in the public domain. For instance, if you need a photograph for your Web site, you should try these resources:

- FWS image library at <http://www.fws.gov/images>; and
- NCTC digital repository at <http://digitalrepository.fws.gov/>.
- If these do not provide what you need, try the image search at <http://www.usa.gov>.

You should avoid using content from other sites, particularly non-Federal government sites, as that content may be protected by copyright laws even if no copyright is indicated.

All photographs on your Web pages must have a visible photo credit. For images from the FWS image library, the photo credit should link back to the source page in the image library that includes additional information about the image (see also section 5.4.1).

If you are using copyrighted content, you must first obtain permission from the copyright holder and retain a copy of the terms of use on file. FWS Form 3-2259 is an approved copyright release form for your use and available at <http://www.fws.gov/forms/>. You must be able to provide the terms of use to a site user who requests them. You must also indicate that the material is copyrighted. While providing a copyright notice is no longer required by U.S. copyright law, it is generally required by copyright holders as part of their terms of use, and it helps to distinguish copyrighted material on our sites from material in the public domain.

2.1.3 Records Management - Service Web Sites as Records

According to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Web site-related records include Web content records, which represent information presented on a Web site; and Web site administrative records, which provide evidence of the design, management and operations of the Web site.

Web content records include standard informational Web pages and also pages through which site users conduct transactions with us (e.g., an online permit application process). Site administrative records include Web policy and procedure documents, site visitation reports, and server documentation.

This does not mean that Web managers must retain all Web content or all material related to site operations. For instance, much of what is posted on Service Web sites is simply a copy of an original “record copy” that is already preserved. Web managers should pay particular attention to content that exists only on the Web, such as pages that allow for online permit or grant applications, or other business transactions.

Information about exactly what, how, and for how long records-worthy material must be maintained can be found in the Service’s records disposition schedule, which is available on the Service Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/283fw2.html>. Please consult with your Records officer for clarification and assistance.

Web records management builds on existing records policy, but raises new issues that are still being resolved. The Web Council and the Service Records manager will provide more detailed guidance as it becomes available.

2.1.4 Security Protocols to Protect Information

Any site hosted and maintained by the Service or hosted and maintained by a third party under contract with the Service must adhere to security standards established by IRTM if the site could reasonably be understood by the general public to be an official communication channel for the Service. If you wish to host FWS content on non-FWS systems or if you provide content for, or wish to create, a partnership site, please see your Web Council representative for assistance in determining your security responsibilities. For more on partnership sites, see section 1.3.1.

2.1.5 No Fear Act Notification

A. “No Fear” Act link has been placed on the Service’s “Notices” page. A link to the Notices page is part of the standard FWS footer (see chapter 4).

2.1.6. Prohibition of Lobbying

The Service and other Federal agencies and their employees are prohibited by Federal law from using appropriated dollars to directly or indirectly influence any member of Congress, a jurisdiction, or official of any government. Our sites should provide objective facts on issues of importance to the Service and the public. They should refrain from making value judgments, particularly in support or opposition to any proposed or existing legislation, particularly by making statements that could be construed as criticizing

current or proposed Congressional appropriations or advocating for increased funding. Thus, we can give the Service's official position on anticipated impact to wildlife of, for example, a proposed construction; but we should not offer an opinion on whether Congress should allow or prohibit such construction.

The exception to this rule occurs when the Administration has taken a formal position on the legislation in question. If such a formal position has been taken, any information posted on Service sites that expresses a value judgment about the legislation must reflect the Administration's position. Speak with your Web Council representative or your External Affairs office if you have questions about the appropriateness of content on your site.

2.1.7 Paperwork Reduction Act

Web sites must not solicit specific information from the public without prior approval from OMB, and must adhere to OMB requirements for such collection. OMB approval is not necessary for collecting information necessary to respond to an information request (so it's okay to collect name and address to mail someone a brochure). OMB approval is also not necessary if you are providing a means for someone to send a question or comment provided you do not attempt to solicit specific information. (You can say, "We welcome your comments and questions," but you can't say, "Please tell us what you think of our new Web design.")

Approval *is* necessary for most other information collection purposes, including such things as volunteer applications, fish tag reporting forms, or duck blind reservation forms. If you have any questions, please speak with your Web Council representative or the Service's Information Collection Officer in the Division of Policy and Directives Management. They may be able to steer you to a way of collecting the information you need that has already been approved by OMB. Because information collection often involves collecting personally-identifying information, you must also consider Privacy Act implications. See section 2.1.1 for more.

If you are collecting this information "non-electronically," i.e., through a form that is faxed or mailed-in, you should consider ways to allow for electronic submission as well (see section 2.1.8 for more). Talk to your Web Council representative about this; there may already be an electronic form you can use. Using an existing form, for which OMB approval has already been granted, can save you a great deal of time and effort.

2.1.8 Government Paperwork Elimination Act

The Paperwork Elimination Act is meant to encourage and control the use of Web sites to conduct government business electronically rather than through paper forms. It provides specific guidance on the use of electronic signatures. Before attempting to move from non-electronic to electronic submission of information, be sure to talk with your Web Council representative. A suitable electronic form may already exist, and there may be Privacy Act and Paperwork Reduction Act implications as well (see section 2.1.1).

2.1.9 Small Business Paperwork Relief Act

We include a link to the DOI Small Business page (<http://www.doi.gov/osdbu/>) on our Notices page. If you manage a Web page (or site) that is intended for small business owners looking to conduct business with the Service, you should include a link on that page (or in a prominent location on that site) as well.

2.1.10 Government Performance Results Act

The Service provides its annual performance plans on its planning site at <http://www.fws.gov/planning/abc/>. Site managers need take no additional action.

2.1.11 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The required link to the Departmental FOIA page is included as part of the standard FWS footer (see chapter 4 for more on implementing the standard FWS footer).

2.1.12 Categorization of Information

Categorization may entail something like a topic index to Service Web-based information. The Service will coordinate with DOI on implementation as guidance is developed.

2.1.13 Section 508 Accessibility for People with Disabilities

You should do everything you can to make sure that the information you post to your Web site can be accessed by everyone who needs it. Generally speaking, the simpler your design, the easier it is for everyone to use your site and access the information it contains. For instance, even a person who is not considered visually disabled will have an easier time using your site if the contrast between text and background color is as high as possible and the text is coded in relative sizes so that it can be enlarged as necessary. See section 2.1.13.D of the DOI Web Standards Handbook for specific guidance on making your Web information fully accessible. Consult your Web Council representative for guidance.

When posting a document to your Web site, use the .pdf format developed by Adobe, Inc. rather than a proprietary format such as Microsoft Word. Section 508 requirements apply to these documents as well and may require you to take specific steps to make these documents accessible. If a contractor is creating the .pdf file as part of a design / print contract, you should stipulate in the contract that the .pdf should be Section 508 compliant.

2.1.14 Limited English Proficiency

If your Web site has a significant non-English speaking audience in need of the information you offer, you should look for ways to provide that information in the appropriate language(s). The Service standard page header includes links for automatic translation of Service pages into Spanish, French, and Simplified Chinese.

2.1.15 Information Quality

All sites will be reviewed on an annual basis for compliance with these standards and for accuracy and timeliness of information. See section 1.3.3 for more details.

As part of the Information Quality Act, Web site users are allowed to challenge formally the accuracy of information we post on our site, even if we did not author that information. If you post non-FWS information on your site (for instance, a report from an outside organization, or comments provided to us), you must provide in a prominent location an Information Quality Act disclaimer as follows:

This document (or information) was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and represents the views of the authors. The Service is providing this document for the convenience of the public but does not endorse or sponsor the information in this document for the purposes of the Information Quality Act (Public Law 106-554).

If the non-FWS content resides in its own file (e.g., a .pdf file or separate Web page), you should insert the Information Quality Act disclaimer so that when the user clicks on the link to the document, the disclaimer will intercept before the user can access the document.

2.1.15.1 Ensure Content is Current and Provide Dates

All Web pages must include the date on which they were last updated. This can be accomplished through Dreamweaver (Insert > Date). The format is as follows:

Last updated: March 15, 2006

This line is to be centered one line above the footer on each page. The “insert date” feature in Dreamweaver can be set to insert the correct date each time the page is saved.

2.1.16 E-Government Act of 2002 – Priorities/Schedules for Posting Content

The “Notices” page will include a link to the appropriate DOI Web page. No action is required on your part.

Chapter 3: Identification (Authenticity and Branding)

3.1 Government Branding

3.1.1 Use of Government Domains

All Fish and Wildlife Service Web sites must be housed at “fws.gov” domains. Partnership sites, including friends’ group sites, cannot be hosted on an FWS server without prior approval of the Service Web Council and the CIO. If such a site is approved for hosting on an FWS server, it must be given a non-FWS domain name (e.g., www.friendsgroup.org).

When the Service participates in a partnership site, the content we provide must be held to the same standards as content on an official FWS site. The server on which that content is held must meet all Service standards for security (see section 2.1.4), as determined by the CIO. Partnership sites must be registered through ISAM, even if hosted on a non-FWS server (see section 1.3.1).

3.2 Indicate Sponsorship of Web Sites

All Service Web pages, whether static or dynamic, must contain the official FWS Web page header, which includes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service logo and “U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service” designation. Microsoft Word, Microsoft Powerpoint, .pdf, and similar files are exempt from this requirement. However, they must indicate FWS sponsorship and may need to follow FWS print guidelines or other standards.

The FWS Web page header is the strongest visual element for establishing the identity of our Web pages. See your Web Council representative for assistance incorporating the FWS header into your pages.

3.2.1 DOI Link and Use of Seal Requirements

A link to the DOI home page is part of the standard FWS footer. See chapter 4 for more on implementing the standard FWS footer.

3.2.2 Bureau Link and Logo Requirements

All Service Web pages will include links back to the Service home page by way of the logo in the standard FWS Web page header, and the home page link in the standard FWS footer.

3.3 Government Portals and Other Federal Sites

You should supplement the material on your sites by linking to other appropriate Federal sites, including cross-agency portals. Check the USA.gov site (<http://www.usa.gov/>) to find relevant sites and linking opportunities.

3.4 Linking Policy and Linking to Non-Federal Web Sites

Linking to other sites can give your site users easy access to information and services that you cannot readily provide. However, when considering whether to link from your site to

a non-Federal Web site, you should consider not just the advantages but also the disadvantages of such a link.

- Links to other sites can break if the site gets reorganized;
- links to commercial sites can create the appearance of an official FWS endorsement and favoritism;
- while the link may go to useful information, other material on the external site may be inappropriate;
- the external site may have different privacy policies or may even contain spyware or other malicious code; or
- if the site goes out of existence, the url may be picked up by a site with inappropriate content.

If you are considering linking to a non-Federal Web site, talk with your Web Council representative first. More information can be found in the DOI Web Standards Handbook.

3.4.1 Vendor and Partner Linking Strategy

Links to vendors and partners are to be considered according to section 3.4 above.

External Links (Section 3.4.1.D.1 in the DOI Handbook)

As part of your annual site review/certification (see section 1.3.3), you must check all your external links to make sure they work and that they are still of value.

Exit Messages (Section 3.4.1.D.2 in the DOI Handbook)

See section 3.4.3 for implementation of exit messages.

3.4.2 Prohibition of Commercial Endorsement

You should avoid linking to commercial establishments and must avoid any appearance of endorsement if you do link. You must use the standard exit message whenever you link to a commercial site.

3.4.3 Exit Messages

If you are linking to a site outside of fws.gov, you must use the appropriate exit message. The exit message appears on an intercepting page after the user clicks on a link. We have two exit messages for your use.

- The standard exit message announces the exit and provides a disclaimer.
- The “exit-to-fed” exit message announces the exit but does not provide a disclaimer.

You must also use the Information Quality Act “disclaimer” language when linking to a document on your site that was not authored by the Service. See section 2.1.15 for details.

Chapter 4: Standard Web Elements

4.1 Document Type Definition and Document Title

You must give all of your Web pages descriptive titles following the guidance in section 4.1 of the DOI Web Standards Handbook.

FWS Web pages should be given a Document Type Definition (DTD) of “XHTML 1.0 transitional.” This can be set as a default for new pages through Dreamweaver’s preferences. Existing pages can be given the correct DTD through the page properties.

4.2 Document Metadata / Meta Tags

All Service Web pages must have the following meta tags:

Title: This is different from the html title tag, but should contain the same content.

Description: a concise description of the content and purpose of the page. Description tags are sometimes used by search engines and shown in the search results page.

Author: All Web pages should list the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as author. Your Web Council representative may have you add one or more additional names here to facilitate Web management in your area.

Last reviewed date: indicates date of last complete check for accuracy and compliance. Whereas the visible “Last updated” date (see section 2.1.15.1) indicates when a page was last modified, the “last reviewed” meta tag indicates that the page was thoroughly examined on that date.

4.3 Required Links/Pages

4.3.1 – 4.3.7 Required Footer

All Web pages must contain the FWS standard footer, which should be placed at the bottom of the main content area of each page.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Home Page | Department of the Interior | USA.gov
About the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | Accessibility | Privacy | Notices |
Disclaimer | FOIA

4.3.8 Contact Us

Every page must contain a link labeled “Contact Us” that goes to a page giving mail, phone, and email contact information for the office that is relevant to that page. You may place the Contact Us link in any conspicuous and appropriate location on your Web pages, but its location should be consistent throughout your site. A template of this page is being prepared to make implementation of this requirement easier. Your Web Council

representative can assist you with a “Contact Us” page and in setting up a comment form that will direct comments to a specified email address.

4.3.9 Search

The Service uses search functionality provided by [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov). A search box is part of the standard FWS header. If you would like to incorporate site-specific search functionality into your site, please speak with your Web Council representative.

4.3.10 [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov)

A link to [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov) is part of the standard FWS footer, to be included on all FWS Web pages.

4.3.11 About Us (Organizational Information)

A link to “About the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service” is included as part of the standard FWS footer, to be included on all FWS Web pages.

4.3.12 – 4.3.17 Notices Page

Links described in sections 4.3.12 to 4.3.17 of the DOI Handbook are recommended for inclusion in the Notices page. A link to the Notices page is provided as part of the standard FWS footer, to be included on all FWS Web pages.

4.4 Recommended Links

You should consider including relevant links described in section 4.4 of the DOI Web Standards Handbook, as appropriate.

Chapter 5: Customer Focus / Ease of Use

5.1.1 Customer Feedback / Customer Satisfaction/Measurement Tools

Web Visitation Reports (Section 5.1.1.D.2 in the DOI Handbook)

The Service creates Web visitation reports for each site. These reports are available through ISAM. You should review your site visitation reports on a monthly basis and use this information to make improvements to your sites. For instance, if certain search terms and phrases are commonly used in your site, give greater prominence to information about those topics.

Email / Comment Forms (Section 5.1.1.D.3 in the DOI Handbook)

Each site must include a “Contact Us” page with contact information, including a way to comment electronically, either through email or through an online comment form (see section 4.3.8).

5.2.1 Link Back to Home Page

Each page in your site must include a link back to the home page for that site. Because “Home” is an ambiguous term, the link must explicitly refer to the site home, as in these examples:

Endangered Species Program home
Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge home
Hunting and Fishing home

5.2.2 Use Consistent Names for Similar Links

All Service Web managers are expected to follow the naming conventions outlined in this handbook for required links. See section 4.3.

5.2.3 Review to Update Broken Links

As part of the annual site certification process (see 1.3.3), you must review all links in your site(s) to ensure that they still function and still point to the intended files. You should perform a link check on a regular basis as part of your ongoing site maintenance.

5.2.4 Consistent Navigation

You must promote consistent navigation through the use of the standard Service header and footer (see sections 3.2.2 and 4.3). You should also use consistent naming and placement of navigation elements throughout your site. For example, if you have a “Frequently Asked Questions” page, do not call it “Questions” on one page and “FAQ” on another.

5.3.1 Home Pages Must Be Customer-Focused

Service Web pages, especially home pages, must be written so they are easily understood by members of the general public with no special knowledge of scientific or governmental terminology or acronyms.

Web authors should write as simply and as concisely as possible to allow users to scan pages for the information they need. See <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/> and <http://www.webcontent.gov> for tips on how to make your pages easier to read and easier to understand.

Home pages should not feature photos of management or staff except as part of news items of interest to the general public. The primary question about any proposed content for a Service Web page should be, “Will this make our site more useful for our intended audience?”

5.3.2 Content Should Be Organized in Ways That Make Sense to Citizens

Most of our site users are unfamiliar with our organizational structure; therefore, you should organize the content of your site using categories such as function or audience group instead. Site users can only find information on your site if it is organized using categories and terms the users will understand.

5.4 Avoid Duplication

5.4.1 Use Existing Web Sites with Same Content Where Appropriate

You should link to Service Web resources rather than recreate those resources. Where existing resources are inadequate to meet the needs of your site, speak with your Web Council representative about the possibility of improving those resources. Your feedback is vital to improving shared Web resources.

You should use the image resources described in section 2.1.2 whenever possible. Link the image to the corresponding page in the FWS image library that includes the image metadata (see section 2.1.2). If you are using Service-owned public domain photographs not currently in the image library, you should work with your External Affairs office to have those images added to the image library.

5.4.2 Linking to Corresponding Web Sites with Similar Content

Other Federal government sites may have pertinent information. You should link to them to provide additional resources for your site users. When linking from a Service Web site to another government site, you must use the appropriate FWS exit notice. See section 3.4 for details.

5.5 Avoid Excessive Download Times

5.5.1 Appropriate Use of Graphics

Like all Web page content, graphics and multimedia files should be used when they provide informational value or improve the functionality of the page. Do not use photos or graphics just to make a page look “interesting” or “pretty.” Web users value government sites primarily for the information and services they can provide, not for their visual appeal.

5.5.2 Reduce Size of Linked Files and Provide Information on File Size and Type

Avoid posting files in proprietary formats in favor of standard formats such as .pdf or .jpg. When linking to a file that requires a plug-in or an application other than the browser to interpret, you should identify the file format for your site users (see also section 2.1.13). If you are linking to a file larger than 500 KB, you should indicate the file size, following this format:

Read "[The Rachel Carson Legacy](#)" (pdf, 750 KB)

There is no simple answer to the question of how large a file must be before it is *too* large. However, there are many factors that affect download speeds, including connection speed and general Web traffic. You should expect that your site users will experience longer download delays than you do in your office. Strive to make your Web files only as large as they absolutely need to be to meet their intended purpose, but no larger. Remember, no one will ever complain that your Web site is *too* fast.

This Web Standards Handbook will be updated as necessary by the Service Web Council. Additional guidance and tutorials will be posted on the intranet at <https://intranet.fws.gov/region9/webpublish/>.