

**APPENDIX O**

**INFORMATION, PLANNING, and**

**CONSULTATION SYSTEM**

## Appendix O

### Information, Planning, and Consultation System (IPaC)

#### The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Vision

The Information, Planning, and Consultation System (IPaC System) is a tool for federal action agencies, their applicants, and other project proponents to use during project development and assessment. The IPaC System, currently under development by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), will integrate species conservation needs with a variety of tools that will facilitate conservation efforts within the Service and with our partners with regard to listed, candidate and other imperiled species. It will also lead to the eventual streamlining of Endangered Species Act consultation procedures. The first phase of the IPaC System will allow project proponents to obtain species lists, species ecological information, bibliographic references, recommended conservation measures for incorporation into project designs, and Service contact information via the internet. It will also notify Service offices of upcoming project activities allowing for better workload planning.

When the first phase of the IPaC System is complete, project proponents will be able to log onto the system, identify the location of their proposed project, provide a short project description, and instantly receive a list of listed resources that may be present in the vicinity of the project (i.e., a species-list). This list will contain links to species accounts that will inform the user on important aspects of the species' life history, threats, and conservation needs and will allow project proponents to begin the process of evaluating the potential for their proposed actions to affect listed, candidate and other imperiled species and their habitat. The system will also contain links to bibliographies of resource information that will provide project proponents with guidance on where they may obtain additional information regarding listed resources. The system will inform project proponents of any special needs such as the timing of species surveys so they may plan their activities as early as possible. It will also provide project proponents with "best management practices" that can be incorporated into project designs to avoid, minimize, or mitigate for potential effects whenever practicable. These BMPs will be founded on "conservation frameworks" for the various listed resources that they are designed to address. Conservation frameworks are practical documents that focus on the conservation objectives that need to be achieved to conserve resources and the processes that can be used to achieve them.

There are three basic aspects of species management that will be addressed through BMPs. First is **avoidance** of adverse effects on species and their habitat. At times there may be simple measures that can be incorporated into project designs that will avoid exposure of listed resources to the potential effects of a proposed activity.

The second aspect of species management that will be addressed through BMPs is **minimization** of adverse effects on listed resources. It may not be possible to avoid all of the potential effects a proposed project may have on species and their habitat, however, there may be measures that can be incorporated into the project design that will minimize the resulting effects.

The third aspect of species management that will be addressed by BMPs is **mitigating any** adverse effects on species and their habitat. Once it is determined that effects to a species

will not be avoided and have been minimized, the remaining effects should be mitigated to ensure that the conservation status of the species will not be degraded.

Since ecological conditions often vary across the landscape, a proposed project in one area may not have the same effects if proposed in a different geographic area. Therefore, the Service anticipates that there may be different BMPs for different species, as well as different BMPs for the same species in different geographic areas. Combine this with the need to ensure that BMPs for different species within the same geographic area are compatible (e.g., when BMPs for multiple species are applied to the same project the results don't become so constricting as to make the project not feasible), this can become a daunting task. For this reason the Service envisions the development of an array of BMPs that may need to be used in varying combinations.

These BMPs will contain descriptions of what they are intended to accomplish from an ecological standpoint, the consequences of not implementing them, and suggestions for achieving similar ecological results in the event that they cannot be implemented. Ultimately, the goal of this process is to provide project proponents with the information needed to complete their own informal cost benefit analyses that will allow them to make educated decisions regarding the design of their projects.

One of the goals of the IPaC system is to decrease the amount of time and effort project proponents have to expend obtaining ecological information that will assist them in evaluating the potential for their proposed projects to affect listed resources and to obtain guidance on steps that can be taken to reduce or eliminate these effects. Ultimately this can lead to better designed projects that may reduce or eliminate the need for consultation.

The IPaC System will be developed in phases as agency needs become known and funding becomes available. Each phase will further streamline the project planning and consultation processes.

## **The NiSource IPaC Project**

As NiSource discussed development of its Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) with the Service, the Service was presented with an option to utilize the IPaC system as an implementation tool for the MSHCP. Our vision is to interface with the IPaC system in a manner that allows NiSource to take advantage of the powerful geo-spatial capabilities of the IPaC System while maintaining company privacy relative to our proprietary information. We are currently working with the IPaC Development Team to create an IPaC module with this in mind.

The NiSource IPaC module will provide a valuable implementation tool for this MSHCP. We envision a system that will allow our project managers to securely enter information on the specific location of a covered activity during the planning phase and receive site-specific information on potential impacts to species and the approved avoidance and minimization measures (AMMs) that must be employed during project implementation. The AMMs that we have negotiated with the Service are, in essence, NiSource BMPs as described in the Service's vision of IPaC. Instead of a range of BMPs to select from in IPaC, AMMs for NiSource will be determined prior to implementation. In addition to those mandatory AMMs, we expect IPaC to provide the non-mandatory AMMs that may be implemented to further reduce take. During this project planning phase, every effort will be made to apply non-mandatory AMMs to the

maximum extent practicable. IPaC will also allow project managers to evaluate alternative specifications for implementing covered activities, when practicable, to reduce take.

In addition, IPaC will help identify and streamline additional consultations needed for species not covered by MSHCP.

Once a specific on-the-ground project occurs, data will be tracked and fed back into the IPaC module. These data may include a host of important information regarding the effectiveness of AMMs, adjustments to the AMMs as a result of lessons learned through adaptive management or changed circumstances, changes to species' ranges as new information is gathered, and information on the take that has occurred under the particular covered activity implemented.

NiSource proposes to collect data on a variety of outcomes while implementing its MSHCP. We are committed to keeping our IPaC module current by inputting data collected from our operations and by coordinating with the Service regarding any additional data that is relevant, for example, species range information. We anticipate incorporating data from Service databases such as Environmental Conservation Online System (ECOS) for important information on MSHCP species. As the MSHCP is amended in the future, we will update our IPaC module to reflect new AMMs, species ranges, etc.

The NiSource IPaC module will provide us with a real-time tool for applying conservation on-the-ground. We look forward to continuing to shape its applicability to the MSHCP during the permit term and beyond.