

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release September 9, 1980

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SEEKS COMMENT ON PROPOSED POLICY FOR MITIGATING LOSS OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking public comment on the guidelines that it uses to protect and conserve fish and wildlife that are affected by major environmental changes, a process known as "mitigation."

The Interior Department agency recently outlined and clarified the operating policy it uses to assist agencies which approve construction projects and other types of development in ensuring the adequate consideration of fish and wildlife interests. This draft mitigation policy was published in the September 9, 1980, Federal Register.

"Fish and wildlife resources belong to the people," Service Director Lynn Greenwalt said. "They are protected and managed for the people by Federal, State, and Indian tribal governments.

"When modifications of land and water threaten fish and wildlife and their habitat, Federal agencies are required by the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and other Federal laws to give equal consideration to their protection and to adopt justifiable measures in their projects to avoid or minimize losses and compensate for unavoidable losses."

The Fish and Wildlife Service is the major Federal agency involved in the management and protection of the Nation's fish and wildlife resources. The Service does not issue licenses and permits for large-scale development projects, but assists development agencies to adequately consider fish and wildlife resources that may be threatened by project development.

After operating under a number of formal and informal policy guidelines on mitigation for many years, the Fish and Wildlife Service believes that an updated and comprehensive statement of policy will allow other government agencies and private developers to anticipate its recommendations for mitigation early in the initial phases of construction projects.

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"A well-defined policy on mitigation would enable government and industry to avoid delays and assure the equal consideration of fish and wildlife resources with the other features and purposes of their projects," Greenwalt said.

Under the proposed policy, a five-part definition of this process developed by the President's Council on Environmental Quality forms the basis of the Service's overall goal of mitigating losses of fish, wildlife, and habitat from the disruptive impacts of land and water development. In summary, mitigation is described as a process by which these impacts are:

- Avoided by not taking a certain action, or parts of an action;
- Minimized by limiting the degree or magnitude of an action, or the manner in which an activity is conducted;
- Rectified by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment;
- Reduced or eliminated over the project's lifetime by preservation and maintenance operations; and
- Compensated for by providing substitute resources or environments.

During the consultation process between agencies, an appropriate level of mitigation is recommended by the Fish and Wildlife Service. It investigates how habitat modifications would lead to changes in an area's biological value to fish and wildlife. The mitigation measures it recommends vary according to the value and scarcity of the species and habitat affected. The two primary considerations are the presence of important species that have a high value to man or are critical to the maintenance of the ecosystem, and the relative scarcity of the particular habitat.

"What this draft policy does is clearly outline our stand on mitigation and reflect the way our role in mitigation, under legislative mandate, is being carried out by the Fish and Wildlife Service," said Greenwalt. "We hope the principle it embodies -- adequate mitigation for important fish and wildlife resources when the environment is altered -- might become more universally recognized."

Comments on the Service's draft mitigation policy should be sent to the Associate Director--Environment, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240 Attn.: John Christian, by October 9, 1980.

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