



NEWS RELEASE

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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**INTERIOR, COMMERCE ANNOUNCE AVAILABILITY OF
ENDANGERED SPECIES PETITION MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE POLICY**

Two Federal agencies charged with listing plants and animals as threatened or endangered species have adopted a new guidance policy to ensure citizen petitions are handled more efficiently.

The Endangered Species Act allows any interested citizen to petition the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service or the Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service to list, delist, or reclassify species or to revise a listed species' critical habitat. The guidance policy describes situations under each category to assist employees in both agencies.

The new policy, which became effective today, outlines specific administrative steps once petitions are received, including guidance concerning "lead Region" responsibilities, timeframes for internal review of 90-day and 12-month findings, petition tracking, preparation of administrative findings and notices, and petitioner notification.

"This new guidance policy regarding petition management won't be readily visible to the public but I think the public, in the end, will be well served by it," said Acting Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Rogers.

"It is another in-house step to ensure that both agencies are strictly consistent in dealing with listing petitions," said Rolland Schmitt, director of the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Rogers and Schmitt said both agencies want the petition process to call appropriate attention to situations affecting the welfare of species or of any other change in a species' biological status.

A draft of the policy guidance document was initially made available through a notice in the December 21, 1994, Federal Register. Because the number of requests for copies was significant, the original 60-day public comment period was extended through April 1995.

The availability notice concerning the final policy was published in the July 9, 1996, Federal Register.

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Persons desiring copies of the guidance policy should write to LaVerne Smith, Chief, Division of Endangered Species (452 ARLSQ), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1849 C St. NW., Washington, DC 20240.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 508 national wildlife refuges encompassing 92 million acres, as well as 72 national fish hatcheries.

The agency also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, stocks recreational fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and assists foreign governments in their conservation efforts. It oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on angling and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.