

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**Information and Expression**

**Part 115 Public Information**

**Chapter 1 Official Public Communications – General Policy and Procedures**

**115 FW 1**

**1.1 What is the purpose of this chapter?** This chapter establishes the policy and procedures governing the official public communications of employees of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and identifies the laws, regulations, and standards governing other public communications of Service employees regarding Service programs, operations, or activities. It establishes standards for excellence in public communications in order to promote broad public understanding of and support for the Service's mission and the work of its programs and employees.

**1.2 What is the scope of this chapter?**

**A.** This chapter applies to all Service programs, offices, and employees.

**B.** The chapter covers the release of information to the public by Service employees through the news and information media, whether through print or electronic means. The chapter governs the release of information that has the potential to generate news media coverage, public interest or inquiry, as well as more routine and noncontroversial information. Examples include, but are not limited to:

**(1)** News media requests for official interviews on Service-related issues and actions, whether from print, broadcast, Web-based, or social media;

**(2)** News releases, advisories, and bulletins;

**(3)** Speeches and statements about official business for public release;

**(4)** Letters to the editor, opinion pieces, and other editorial products expressing the Service's viewpoint on Service-related issues and actions; and

**(5)** Similar expressions of Service policy posted or distributed using electronic methods, such as social media and Web site postings.

**C.** Except as otherwise noted, this chapter does not apply to the development and submission of scientific, scholarly, and technical articles and reports produced as a result of official activities submitted to or published in peer-reviewed scientific, scholarly, or technical publications. These publications include the [Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management](#) and [North American Fauna](#). For policies and procedures governing these types of articles, refer to [117 FW 1](#), Policy Review Guidance for Scientific Publications.

**1.3 What are the objectives of this chapter?** Our objectives are for employees to:

**A.** Clearly understand and comply with our obligation to release information to the public that is accurate and up-to-date;

**B.** Understand what constitutes an official expression of Service policy or opinion, and be able to differentiate it from their individual opinion of agency policies, actions, and decisions;

**C.** Understand the circumstances under which they may communicate on behalf of the Service, and how they may receive permission to do so; and

**D.** Understand how to obtain approval for communications of official policy and opinion, and how to distribute those communications.

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**Information and Expression**

**Part 115 Public Information**

**Chapter 1 Official Public Communications – General Policy and Procedures**

**115 FW 1**

**1.4 What are the authorities for this chapter?**

A. [Departmental Manual \(DM\) 470](#), Public Communications.

B. Standards for Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch ([5 CFR 2635.702\(b\)](#) and [5 CFR 2635.807\(b\)](#)).

**1.5 What terms do you need to know to understand this chapter?**

**A. Public Communications:** Public communications is the release of information to the public through press releases, news media advisories, news media events, news features, news media interviews, speeches, statements about official business for public release, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, social media, Internet and Intranet postings, and by other means. There are two types of public communications in this and the other chapters in Part 115:

(1) *Official Public Communications:* Official public communications are public communications made by Service employees in their official capacity on behalf of the agency concerning Service policy, actions, decisions, or opinions. This type of public communication is addressed in this chapter.

(2) *Other Public Communications Regarding Service Programs, Operations, and Activities:* These are public communications regarding the programs, operations, and activities of the Service made by agency employees in their individual capacity. Such communications may be related to an employee's official duties or based primarily on knowledge acquired through official duties, but are not made by employees on behalf of the Service. These types of communications are addressed in [115 FW 2](#).

**B. News Media:** Determining who we consider a member of the news media may be difficult, given the proliferation of blogs, Web sites, podcasts, and other information channels that bear little resemblance to traditional news media outlets. If you have questions about whether an individual or organization is a member of the news media, contact your servicing External Affairs office. The following definition is from the Open Government Act of 2007 and includes the types of inquiries that are covered by this policy:

(1) A "representative of the news media" means any person or entity that gathers information of potential interest to a segment of the public, uses its editorial skills to turn the raw materials into a distinct work, and distributes that work to an audience. The term "news" means information that is about current events or that would be of current interest to the public.

(2) Examples of news media entities are television or radio stations broadcasting to the public, and print and electronic outlets that distribute news and editorial content to the public. Many nongovernmental organizations and government entities operate magazines, Web sites, and other distribution channels that also provide news and editorial content to their members and constituents, and should also be considered news media for the purposes of this policy. These examples are not all-inclusive and we may consider other entities, such as independent bloggers, to be news media as methods of news delivery evolve.

**C. Significant policy announcements, decisions, or communications of official Service policy:** A significant official announcement, decision, or communication is one that:

(1) Involves controversial issues, actions, or opinions;

(2) Involves high-profile species, habitats, or resource laws;

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**Information and Expression**

**Part 115 Public Information**

**Chapter 1 Official Public Communications – General Policy and Procedures**

**115 FW 1**

- (3) Has national or regional policy implications for the Service or other Federal, State, tribal, or local agencies, or partners;
- (4) Requires public notification in the *Federal Register* or other outlets to meet the requirements of Federal law;
- (5) May offer positive outreach opportunities for the Service, the Director, or the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary); or
- (6) Is otherwise likely to generate national or regional news media coverage, congressional, or partner interest.

*If you have questions about whether an announcement, decision, or communication is significant and requires the development of a strategic communications plan, contact your Regional or Headquarters External Affairs office.*

**1.6 What is the Service's policy for official public communications?** The Service supports a culture of openness with the news media and the public that values the free exchange of ideas, data, and information and that provides for the dissemination of accurate scientific, scholarly, technical, and management information. We are committed to keeping our constituencies and the general public informed, and we welcome public interest in our programs and activities through news media coverage and other forms of communications. Accordingly, it is our policy to:

- A.** Use the news media, Web-based, and social media products and other communications channels to report, explain to, and interpret for the public our policies, programs, and activities.
- B.** Use clear, concise language, avoid jargon, limit the use of technical terms in public communications wherever possible, and explain any necessary technical terms for a general audience. For guidelines on scientific writings and publications, see [117 FW 1](#).
- C.** Ensure that information provided to the news media and the public is accurate and delivered in a timely manner, and maximize disclosure consistent with the requirements and intentions of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). (See [383 DM 15](#) for FOIA policy and procedures.)
- D.** Uphold high standards of ethical conduct for all public affairs employees and any other employees who communicate official Service policy, opinions, and actions.
- E.** Ensure that employees may speak directly with the news media and share information, subject to the following conditions:
  - (1) Employees may provide routine information (such as information on operating hours or the details of a public program or event) without obtaining prior approval.
  - (2) If contacted by news media for anything other than routine information, employees should follow the specific guidance in [sections 1.15](#) and [1.16](#).
  - (3) Employees who want to contact national or significant regional print, broadcast, or electronic news media organizations to pitch stories or generate news media interest in a particular issue should notify the appropriate External Affairs staff in the Regional or Headquarters office prior to doing so, to coordinate efforts and ensure that leadership is notified.

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

F. This policy does not authorize or require disclosure of information that is exempt from disclosure under FOIA ([5 U.S. C. 552](#)) or otherwise restricted by statute, regulation, Executive Order, or other Executive Branch or Departmental policies or directives. Examples of information not releasable under this policy include information that is, or is marked as:

- (1) Classified information,
- (2) Procurement-sensitive information,
- (3) Information protected by the Privacy Act, and
- (4) Other information subject to privilege, such as deliberative, pre-decisional information or attorney-client communications.

**1.7 Who is responsible for approving and overseeing the development of official expressions of Service policy and opinion?**

Table 1-1: Responsibilities for approving and overseeing the development of official expressions of Service policy and opinion	
These employees...	Are responsible for...
<b>A. The Director</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Overall leadership and direction for the Service’s communications efforts, and</li> <li>(2) Executive approval of all official expressions of Servicewide policy and opinion.</li> </ul>
<b>B. The Assistant Director – External Affairs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Providing overall leadership and coordination for the Service’s public affairs activities, promoting a culture of openness with the news media and the public, and supporting the principles of this policy;</li> <li>(2) Overseeing the development, dissemination, and implementation of Servicewide employee communications policies and procedures on behalf of the Director and, when appropriate, the Office of the Secretary, in consultation with the Department’s Office of Communications (DOI OCO);</li> <li>(3) Overseeing the development and dissemination of communications strategies, tactics, and products concerning issues of agency interest or importance, in consultation with the Director’s office, DOI OCO, and Regional External Affairs and program leadership as appropriate;</li> <li>(4) Providing overall guidance and having final authority on the development and use of social media, the Intranet, and Web content;</li> <li>(5) Reviewing requests for official communications as needed, and delegating review to the Chief of Public Affairs or Regional External Affairs leadership, as appropriate;</li> <li>(6) Providing guidance to programs and Regional offices on public communications by employees, consistent with this chapter;</li> <li>(7) Designating official agency spokespeople, in consultation with the Director’s office, DOI OCO, and Regional External Affairs and program</li> </ul>

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

<b>Table 1-1: Responsibilities for approving and overseeing the development of official expressions of Service policy and opinion</b>	
<b>These employees...</b>	<b>Are responsible for...</b>
	<p>leadership on issues of national importance and significant public and news media interest, as appropriate;</p> <p><b>(8)</b> Working with the Director's office, Assistant Secretary's office, DOI OCO, and the Office of the Solicitor, as necessary, to address and resolve internal disagreements (see section 1.18) that may arise from a decision to proceed or not proceed with the issuance of a news release or other type of official public communications at the national level; and</p> <p><b>(9)</b> Referring matters that concern scientific or scholarly integrity to appropriate officials implementing the policy in <a href="#">117 FW 1</a> and the Departmental Manual chapter on Integrity of Scientific and Scholarly Activities (<a href="#">305 DM 3</a>).</p>
<b>C. Regional Directors</b>	<p><b>(1)</b> Providing overall leadership and direction for Regional communications efforts, and</p> <p><b>(2)</b> Approving all official expressions of Regional policy and opinion, in consultation with the Director's office.</p>
<b>D. The Chief, Division of Public Affairs</b>	<p><b>(1)</b> Ensuring that communications activities adhere to Service and Departmental policies, procedures, and priorities, and coordinating public affairs and communications activities with DOI OCO and Service and Departmental Congressional and Legislative Affairs staff, in consultation with the Director's office and External Affairs leadership;</p> <p><b>(2)</b> Advising External Affairs leadership and the Directorate on strategies, messaging, and dissemination of official Service opinion, communications strategy, and policy;</p> <p><b>(3)</b> Approving communications of official Service policy and opinion on behalf of the Director and External Affairs leadership, when designated to do so;</p> <p><b>(4)</b> Overseeing the development and dissemination of communications of official Service opinions, policy, and actions, adhering to Service and Departmental policies, procedures, and priorities, and in coordination with DOI OCO, the Director's office, the Assistant Director for External Affairs, and the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs;</p> <p><b>(5)</b> Consulting with DOI OCO and External Affairs leadership to determine the appropriate response to issues that have the potential to generate significant news media coverage and public interest or inquiry;</p> <p><b>(6)</b> Referring news media inquiries to DOI OCO when those inquiries involve Departmental policy, opinions, or actions, and offering DOI OCO the opportunity to provide a Departmental spokesperson for national news media inquiries;</p>

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

<b>Table 1-1: Responsibilities for approving and overseeing the development of official expressions of Service policy and opinion</b>	
<b>These employees...</b>	<b>Are responsible for...</b>
	<p><b>(7)</b> Ensuring the accuracy of public communications and providing for final scientific and technical review by scientists, scholars, biologists, and other employees prior to release, when time permits. When time is limited, giving the appropriate scientists, scholars, biologists, or other employees an opportunity to correct scientific or technical information in the communication(s);</p> <p><b>(8)</b> Providing guidance and support to program and Regional communications staff and other Service employees to enable effective and coordinated communications efforts, consistent with the requirements in this chapter;</p> <p><b>(9)</b> Consulting with DOI OCO and the Office of the Chief Information Officer through the Service’s Webmaster prior to creating new social media profiles or presences that have not been previously approved for use;</p> <p><b>(10)</b> Working with the Webmaster to provide guidance to employees on the use of social media, the Intranet, and Web postings, consistent with Service and Departmental social media policy and this chapter;</p> <p><b>(11)</b> Monitoring and reviewing, where appropriate, the content employees publish on blogs, wikis, social networking Web sites, or other forms of social media in their official capacity;</p> <p><b>(12)</b> Ensuring that all-employee messages and other communications from the Director to employees are reviewed and approved following established procedures;</p> <p><b>(13)</b> Working with the Assistant Director – External Affairs, providing a mechanism to resolve disputes arising from a decision to proceed or not proceed with the issuance of a Service news release or other type of public communication and providing for appeals, as appropriate; and</p> <p><b>(14)</b> Referring matters that may concern scientific or scholarly integrity to the Office of Science Applications for guidance and resolution, consistent with <a href="#">117 FW 1</a> and <a href="#">305 DM 3</a>.</p>
<b>E. Assistant Regional Directors – External Affairs</b>	<p><b>(1)</b> Advising Regional Directors and their respective Regional Directorate on Regional expressions of official Service opinion, communications strategy, and policy;</p> <p><b>(2)</b> Approving expressions of official Service policy and opinion on behalf of the Regional Director, when designated to do so;</p> <p><b>(3)</b> Overseeing the development and dissemination of Regional communications of official Service opinions, policy, and actions, adhering</p>

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

<b>Table 1-1: Responsibilities for approving and overseeing the development of official expressions of Service policy and opinion</b>	
<b>These employees...</b>	<b>Are responsible for...</b>
	<p>to Service and Departmental policies, procedures, and priorities, and in coordination with DOI OCO, the Director’s office, the Assistant Director – External Affairs, and the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs;</p> <p><b>(4)</b> Consulting with External Affairs leadership to determine the appropriate response to issues that have the potential to generate significant news media coverage, public interest, or inquiry;</p> <p><b>(5)</b> Notifying the Headquarters office of External Affairs about interview requests that deal with national policy issues or are from nationally significant news media (e.g., national news broadcasts, national periodicals, etc.);</p> <p><b>(6)</b> Ensuring the accuracy of Regional public communications and providing for final scientific and technical review by scientists, scholars, biologists, and other employees prior to release, when time permits. When time is limited, giving the appropriate scientists, scholars, biologists, or other employees an opportunity to correct scientific or technical information;</p> <p><b>(7)</b> Providing guidance and support to Regional communications staff and other Regional Service employees to enable effective and coordinated communications efforts, consistent with the requirements in this chapter;</p> <p><b>(8)</b> Consulting with the Headquarters office of External Affairs and the Office of the Chief Information Officer through the Service’s Webmaster before creating new social media profiles or presences that have not been previously approved for use;</p> <p><b>(9)</b> Working with the Regional Webmaster to provide guidance to employees on the use of social media, the Intranet, and Web postings, consistent with Service and Departmental social media policy and this chapter;</p> <p><b>(10)</b> Monitoring and reviewing, where appropriate, the content Regional employees publish on blogs, wikis, social networking Web sites, or other forms of social media in their official capacity;</p> <p><b>(11)</b> Ensuring that Regional all-employee messages and other communications from their Regional Director to Regional employees are reviewed and approved following established procedures;</p> <p><b>(12)</b> Providing a mechanism to resolve disputes arising from a decision to proceed or not proceed with the issuance of a Service news release or other type of public communications at the Regional level, where appropriate, in consultation with the Assistant Director – External Affairs and the Chief of Public Affairs; and</p>

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

Table 1-1: Responsibilities for approving and overseeing the development of official expressions of Service policy and opinion	
These employees...	Are responsible for...
	(13) Referring matters that may concern scientific or scholarly integrity to the Office of Science Applications for guidance and resolution, consistent with <a href="#">117 FW 1</a> and <a href="#">305 DM 3</a> .

**1.8 Who may designate spokespeople, and what is the Service’s policy on official spokespeople?**

**A.** Acting on behalf of the Director, the Assistant Director – External Affairs (or for Regional issues, the Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs acting on behalf of the Regional Director), may designate an agency spokesperson as necessary to provide consistent, accurate information to the news media and public.

**B.** For issues of local or Regional interest, the Regional Director may delegate this responsibility to Project Leaders and field office supervisors.

**C.** External Affairs:

(1) Will work to provide articulate and knowledgeable spokespeople who can best communicate the Service’s position on the issue in question in consultation with appropriate scientific and technical experts when the communications involve scientific and technical information; and

(2) Will agree to all reasonable requests from the media to interview employees if the employees agree to be interviewed and the journalist clearly understands whether the employees are speaking on behalf of the Service.

**1.9 When is a strategic communications plan required, and who makes that decision?**

**A.** In general, to ensure our communications are effective, employees seeking to disseminate significant policy announcements, decisions, or communications (see [section 1.5](#) above) must develop, obtain approval for, and implement a strategic communications plan.

**B.** The responsible Regional Director and Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs, or the programmatic Directorate member and the Assistant Director – External Affairs (in Headquarters) decide if communications require a strategic communications plan.

**C.** In emergency situations that threaten life or property, official communications related to the emergency may be developed and disseminated as needed without following standard review and approval procedures. If an Incident Command System (ICS) has been established, the Incident Commander or his/her designee may need to review and approve official emergency communications.

**1.10 Who prepares strategic communications plans and supporting communications materials?**

**A.** Communications and outreach professionals in External Affairs should work with program or Regional subject matter experts, or both, and communications staff to prepare strategic communications plans. The plans must start with a clearly identifiable communications goal or goals, and include specific strategies, tactics, and products designed to reach clearly defined audiences in support of those goals. These professionals should work closely with field, program, and Regional staff responsible for the issue.

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**B.** Program, Regional, and field staff may develop these materials as well, but they should ensure that staff from External Affairs review and approve the materials (see [section 1.11](#)).

**C.** Information on communications planning, including guidance on how to develop and secure the approval of strategic communications plans, is available on the [Service's Intranet site](#), from the Headquarters' External Affairs program, and from Regional External Affairs offices.

**1.11 What is the approval process for communications products?**

**A.** Table 1-2 describes the types of communications products and who needs to review and approve them after they've been through an office's internal chain of command. See [section 1.12](#) for information about when the Department's review is necessary.

<b>Table 1-2: Approval Process for Communications Products</b>	
<b>This type of product....</b>	<b>Requires review and approval from...</b>
<b>(1)</b> Strategic communications plans and products developed in Headquarters (HQ) that do not contain quotes attributed to the Director or a Deputy Director	<p><b>(a)</b> Appropriate scientists/biologists directly involved in the development of the product in question, specifically to ensure accuracy of the science</p> <p><b>(b)</b> Directorate members of the programs affected</p> <p><b>(c)</b> Assistant Director – External Affairs</p>
<b>(2)</b> Strategic communications plans and products developed in HQ that include statements, quotations, or opinions attributed to the Director or a Deputy Director	<p><b>(a)</b> Appropriate scientists/biologists directly involved in the development of the product in question, specifically to ensure accuracy of the science</p> <p><b>(b)</b> Directorate members of the programs affected</p> <p><b>(c)</b> Assistant Director – External Affairs</p> <p><b>(d)</b> Director (if new policy statement)</p>
<b>(3)</b> Strategic communications plans and products developed in the Region or field offices when the issue involves one program	<p><b>(a)</b> Appropriate scientists/biologists directly involved in the development of the product in question, specifically to ensure accuracy of the science</p> <p><b>(b)</b> Assistant Regional Director of the program affected</p> <p><b>(c)</b> Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs</p>
<b>(4)</b> Strategic communications plans and products developed in the Region or field offices when the issue involves multiple programs	<p><b>(a)</b> Appropriate scientists/biologists directly involved in the development of the product in question, specifically to ensure accuracy of the science</p> <p><b>(b)</b> Assistant Regional Directors of the programs affected</p> <p><b>(c)</b> Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs</p>
<b>(5)</b> Strategic communications plans and products developed in the Region or field offices when the issue involves multiple Regions	<p><b>(a)</b> Appropriate scientists/biologists directly involved in the development of the product in question, specifically to ensure accuracy of the science</p>

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

<b>Table 1-2: Approval Process for Communications Products</b>	
<b>This type of product....</b>	<b>Requires review and approval from...</b>
	<p><b>(b)</b> Assistant Regional Directors of the programs affected</p> <p><b>(c)</b> Assistant Regional Directors – External Affairs of the Regions affected</p>
<p><b>(6)</b> Strategic communications plans and products developed in the Region or field offices with statements, quotations, or opinions attributed to the Regional Director or his/her deputy.</p>	<p><b>(a)</b> Appropriate scientists/biologists directly involved in the development of the product in question, specifically to ensure accuracy of the science</p> <p><b>(b)</b> Assistant Regional Director of the program affected</p> <p><b>(c)</b> Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs</p> <p><b>(d)</b> Regional Director</p>
<p><b>(7)</b> Major speeches that describe important policy or significant decisions</p>	<p><b>(a)</b> Assistant Director – External Affairs</p> <p><b>(b)</b> Director</p>
<p><b>(8)</b> Articles for publication, letters to the editor, editorial replies, op-eds, and other products that represent the Service’s official position</p>	<p><b>(a)</b> Appropriate scientists/biologists directly involved in the development of the product in question, specifically to ensure accuracy of the science</p> <p><b>(b)</b> Assistant Director – External Affairs or Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs, or both</p> <p><b>(c)</b> <i>For national issues:</i> Director, and <i>for Regional issues:</i> Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs and the Regional Director</p>

**B.** In general, employees do not need to send Regional strategic communications packages that do not involve national policy issues or controversy to HQ for approval. The originating office may send them through the Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs for approval. The field office or Regional office should work with the Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs to determine if any officials in HQ need to review or approve the strategic communications package.

**C.** If a package is not sent to HQ for review, the originating Regional or field office still must notify HQ External Affairs about the date of the pending announcement to coordinate:

- (1)** Timing and method of public announcements, as appropriate; and
- (2)** Notification of appropriate congressional contacts with the Division of Congressional and Legislative Affairs.

**D.** Program offices or the Assistant Director – External Affairs may ask to review some Regional or field office strategic communications packages, depending on their impact.

**E.** Regional Directors and Assistant Regional Directors for External Affairs are still responsible for notifying HQ of Regional strategic communications and outreach efforts and making sure those efforts are coordinated with Congressional and Legislative Affairs staff.

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**Information and Expression**

**Part 115 Public Information**

**Chapter 1 Official Public Communications – General Policy and Procedures**

**115 FW 1**

**1.12 How does the Service coordinate communications with the Department?**

**A.** Some strategic communications plans and products (and the timing and method of their dissemination) require clearance from DOI OCO in addition to HQ External Affairs and the Director's office. These include, but are not limited to:

**(1)** Releases or other printed or audiovisual materials quoting the Secretary, Assistant Secretaries, or other bureau heads in the Department;

**(2)** Strategic communications plans and products concerning highly controversial announcements and decisions likely to generate national news media or broad congressional interest;

**(3)** Announcements or decisions involving high-profile species;

**(4)** Announcements or decisions with broad policy implications; and

**(5)** Announcements that may offer significant positive outreach opportunities for the Director or Secretary to become involved (i.e., delisting announcements, significant habitat or species conservation agreements, or restoration projects).

**B.** Employees who want approval for this type of strategic communications package should check with Regional or HQ External Affairs staff as appropriate to determine the appropriate level of review and approval.

**C.** The Assistant Director – External Affairs works with DOI OCO to determine which strategic communications packages require DOI OCO's review and approval and coordinates those requirements with the appropriate Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs. Strategic communications packages planned for release at the Regional or field level may also be subject to review and approval by HQ External Affairs and DOI OCO (e.g., policy announcements or when widespread news coverage is anticipated).

**D.** Written or graphic materials or speeches we prepare in response to requests for official communications from non-governmental organizations, firms, or groups may be subject to prior review by DOI OCO. The following conditions apply to these outside requests:

**(1)** The preparation or presentation of material in response to requests for official communications must not impose an unreasonable burden on the staff concerned; and

**(2)** The official communications must promote better and wider understanding of Service and Departmental objectives, policies, programs, and activities.

**1.13 How do employees get information posted on the Service's national or Regional home Internet pages and distributed to national news media?**

**A. National page:**

**(1)** Requests to post content on the Service's national Web site home page ([www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)) must be received by the HQ Division of Marketing Communications (HQ MarCom) at least 2 business days before the date of intended posting/distribution;

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**Information and Expression**

**Part 115 Public Information**

**Chapter 1 Official Public Communications – General Policy and Procedures**

**115 FW 1**

(2) Content submitted for consideration to be posted and distributed nationally should be reviewed and approved by Regional External Affairs (in the Regions), HQ External Affairs (in HQ), and program leadership following established procedures.

(3) A request to post and distribute the content must be sent to HQ MarCom, with a copy to any appropriate Regional External Affairs staff contact. The email must include:

- (a) Desired date/time for posting;
- (b) Brief paragraph with headline describing the action;
- (c) Any graphic content (e.g., photo, logo, illustration) with attribution and copyright information, if any, as well as a cutline for the photo or illustration;
- (d) Any attachments to post (all news releases must be approved through standard clearance procedures); and
- (e) Any links to online pages or documents.

(4) The Chief of Public Affairs or a designee must approve all postings before they go live. Division of Public Affairs staff will coordinate with the HQ MarCom staff to ensure that the materials are posted as approved.

**B. Regional pages:**

(1) Employees who want to post content to Regional home pages should contact their Assistant Regional Director - External Affairs for review and approval procedures.

(2) Field employees who want to post content to Regional or national Web sites should follow local field office approval procedures prior to contacting the Regional office or HQ MarCom.

**C. All Service pages:** Program, Regional, and field office Web managers and their supervisors are responsible for the accuracy and consistency of all content posted on the Web pages they oversee. This content should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it is accurate and current.

**1.14 How does the Service oversee official use of social media and social networking?** We encourage programs, Regions, and field offices to use social media tools to communicate their missions and messages with the public.

**A.** When using social media tools, employees must:

(1) Seek guidance from their External Affairs office about strategies for using social media, and to assess whether they can devote the resources and staff to communicate effectively using social media before starting; and

(2) Seek approval for new social media accounts from their respective Social Media Coordinators and, as needed, work with the National Social Media Coordinator, who will work with the Department's New Media Director to secure approval. Any social networking profiles or social media presences that have not been approved may be terminated.

**B.** The following principles apply to official use of public-facing social media services:

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**Information and Expression**

**Part 115 Public Information**

**Chapter 1 Official Public Communications – General Policy and Procedures**

**115 FW 1**

(1) Employees may only discuss Service-related information that we consider public information. Employees may not discuss sensitive, proprietary, or classified information. This rule applies even in circumstances where password or other privacy controls are implemented. Failure to comply may result in fines or disciplinary action.

(2) Any substantive information or audiovisual products posted to a third-party social media Web site must also be provided in another publicly available format such as the Department's or the Service's Web site. Third-party social media Web sites must never be the only place in which the public can view Service information.

(3) Our programs and Regional and field offices are responsible for the content employees publish on blogs, wikis, social networking Web sites, or other forms of social media in their official capacity.

(4) Employees using social media or social networking in their official capacity are subject to Service, Departmental, and Executive Branch conduct guidelines and regulations, such as the Appropriate Use of the Internet, Limited Personal Use of Government Equipment, and Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch.

**1.15 How should all employees handle news media inquiries?** Service employees may speak freely to the media and the public about scientific and technical matters based on their own work, including scientific and technical ideas, approaches, findings, and conclusions. If they have not received prior approval from the Assistant Director – External Affairs or their Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs to speak on behalf of the Service on scientific or technical matters, employees must clearly state that they are not representing the Service and the views they are expressing are their own. Employees may not speak in either an official or unofficial capacity on matters involving Service policy or positions without specific authorization from the Assistant Director – External Affairs.

**A.** Employees who receive requests from the news media for routine information (i.e., refuge operating hours and other information that is provided as a matter of course to the public) do not need to confer with External Affairs.

**B.** Employees who receive requests for information or interviews from the news media on matters involving official Service policies or positions must work with Regional or HQ External Affairs leadership, as appropriate, as well as their supervisor, before granting the interview, to ensure the Service has the opportunity to respond in an official capacity.

**C.** Employees should not be prohibited from speaking to the news media unless it would result in disclosure of information that is exempt from disclosure (see [section 1.6F](#)). However, managers must require their employees to make it clear that they do not speak for the Service.

**D.** Consistent with [section 1.16](#), employees may only speak to the news media on behalf of the Service with prior approval. This requirement applies to all news media requests, including those that concern employees' scientific, technical, and scholarly articles produced as a result of official work for the agency and that are covered by [117 FW 1](#).

**E.** A Service Public Affairs Officer may join employees when the employees are speaking in an official capacity on behalf of the Service during an interview. Presence of a Public Affairs Officer may help employees in a number of ways:

(1) Minimizes the chances that the employee will be misquoted or quoted out of context,

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**Information and Expression**

**Part 115 Public Information**

**Chapter 1 Official Public Communications – General Policy and Procedures**

**115 FW 1**

(2) Helps with the retraction or correction process if the media misquotes the employee or quotes him/her out of context,

(3) Supports the employee during the interview for questions that may be outside of the employee's area of expertise, and

(4) Provides a broad Service perspective that may be outside of the employee's scope of understanding or position.

F. If employees choose to speak to the news media about their work, but are not authorized to speak on behalf of the Service, they must follow the policies and procedures in [115 FW 2](#), Other Public Communications.

G. Employees should report all news media contacts to Regional or HQ External Affairs on a weekly basis and include the following information:

(1) News media outlet name and location,

(2) Reporter's name,

(3) Brief description of the story topic,

(4) A summary of information provided to the reporter,

(5) The projected level of controversy associated with the story, and

(6) The expected date of publication or broadcast, if known.

H. Employees speaking on behalf of the Service are responsible for the content of their statements, should strive to be accurate, and should articulate the Service's position clearly.

I. All designated spokespeople, as well as External Affairs staff, should ensure as much as possible that talking points, statements, and other communications materials they will use in an interview or otherwise release to the public are reviewed for accuracy by the appropriate Service biologists or other technical experts before dissemination.

**1.16 What are the responsibilities of employees who interact with the news media in an official capacity?**

A. All employees should understand the difference between public communications made in their official capacity and other public communications regarding the programs, operations, or activities of the Service and the Department made in their individual capacity.

B. Employees who are authorized to speak on behalf of the agency, whether they are communications and outreach professionals or not, are expected to work in close coordination with External Affairs to:

(1) Disseminate accurate and adequate information about their work and confine statements made in their official capacity to factual material related to their area of responsibility;

(2) Act promptly to correct mistakes or erroneous information, both internally and externally;

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**Information and Expression**

**Part 115 Public Information**

**Chapter 1 Official Public Communications – General Policy and Procedures**

**115 FW 1**

- (3) Clearly indicate to the public and news media whether they are communicating in their official capacity or in an individual capacity expressing their personal views;
- (4) Promote the free flow of scientific and technical information, adhering to the following practices:
- (a) Employees may not alter the substance of scientific, scholarly, and technical information authored or produced by anyone other than themselves;
  - (b) To the extent practicable, employees must provide scientists, scholars, engineers, and other subject matter experts with the opportunity to conduct a factual review of any Service statements or characterizations of their work before they are used; and
  - (c) Employees must abide by [117 FW 1](#) and [305 DM 3](#) when dealing with matters that may concern scientific or scholarly integrity;
- (5) Honor embargoed dates for publications;
- (6) Respond promptly to news media requests and respect news media deadlines, to the extent practicable;
- (7) Appropriately protect information that is exempt from disclosure or where disclosure is restricted by statute, regulation, Executive Order, or other Executive Branch policies and directives;
- (8) Internally promote policies and actions that support the Service's mission and provide prompt, accurate, and complete information to the public;
- (9) Promote diversity in the agency's publications, audiovisual productions, and other official communications where appropriate;
- (10) Ensure cooperation to the extent practicable with non-governmental organizations, firms, or groups requesting official communications in the form of written or graphic material, or speeches that require special preparation consistent with the procedures of [section 1.6E](#) of this chapter;
- (11) Increase dissemination of information through suitable non-governmental news media (for procedures, see [476 DM](#));
- (12) Refer, through appropriate Service channels, any news releases or requests for news media interviews concerning policy matters, or that cut across Service or Department lines to the appropriate officials for prior review and approval; and
- (13) Comply with the laws, regulations, and standards identified in this chapter governing other public communications.

**1.17 What is the Service's policy on the use of paid advertising?**

**A.** It is the general policy of the Service and the Department not to use paid advertising in connection with our programs and activities, unless there is a specific legal requirement and authority to do so. Refer questions about what constitutes paid advertising and whether approval is needed to your servicing External Affairs office.

**B.** If a program or duty station believes paid advertising is necessary because of the significant benefits it affords in enhancing public participation, the following conditions apply:

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**Information and Expression**

**Part 115 Public Information**

**Chapter 1 Official Public Communications – General Policy and Procedures**

**115 FW 1**

(1) Paid advertising requires prior written approval by the Assistant Director - External Affairs or DOI OCO, in consultation with the Office of the Solicitor.

(2) No paid advertising will be approved or authorized without a strong justification that supports a critical program or activity.

(3) The Assistant Director - External Affairs determines when DOI OCO must review a request; however, DOI OCO may ask to review any request for paid advertising.

(4) This provision does not apply to recruitment advertisements or to our sponsorship of conferences in which a Service advertisement is featured in conference materials.

**C. Sponsorship of television, film, and Web-based documentaries is not paid advertising if:**

(1) The Service's sponsorship of the documentary is clearly and prominently displayed during the documentary,

(2) A disclaimer is clearly and prominently displayed stating that the views expressed in the documentary do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and

(3) The documentary complies with all other applicable Service policies concerning the approval, production, and distribution of video products.

**D. Video news releases; Service-produced videos; and print, broadcast, and Web-based public service announcements are not paid advertising if:**

(1) The product displays the Service shield and clearly and prominently indicates the Service's sponsorship;

(2) The product complies with all other applicable Service policies concerning the approval, production, and distribution of print or video products; and

(3) A reasonable person would clearly understand that the product was sponsored by the Service. No attempt should ever be made to disguise or omit the origins of any product the Service produces or funds.

**E. Legal notices are not paid advertising.**

**1.18 What dispute resolution process does the Service use if scientists disagree with External Affairs employees or vice versa?**

**A.** External Affairs staff are experienced in turning complex scientific principles, methods, results, and conclusions into language that a lay audience can understand, but in the process disagreements with scientists may arise. Service scientists and Public Affairs Officers should always try to resolve these disagreements at the staff level. If they can't reach agreement, they should elevate the issue through the Service's chain of command:

(1) First, to the Chief of Public Affairs (or Assistant Regional Director – External Affairs in the Regional office) and the scientist's/biologist's supervisor or program manager for resolution.

(2) If those officials can't resolve the issue, they should elevate the disagreement to the next level(s) of the organization until a resolution is reached.

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION**

**Information and Expression**

**Part 115 Public Information**

**Chapter 1 Official Public Communications – General Policy and Procedures**

**115 FW 1**

**B.** If a scientist believes there is a scientific integrity issue related to public affairs materials, they should refer to our scientific integrity policy (see 212 FW 7) for more information or visit the Department's scientific integrity [Web site](#).

/sgd/ James W. Kurth  
ACTING DIRECTOR

Date: August 21, 2015