



713 FW 1
Aquatic Animal Health Policy
Overview

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1.1 What is the purpose of this Part? The chapters in this Part (713 FW 1-5) establish the Fish and Wildlife Service Aquatic Animal Health Policy and standards. These chapters and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Handbook of Aquatic Animal Health Procedures and Protocols \(Handbook\)](#) serve as the basis for our efforts to contain, control, and minimize the impacts of aquatic animal pathogens and diseases on Service-managed and Service-contracted properties (i.e., lands, waters, facilities, and Service-contracted hatcheries).

1.2 What is the scope of this chapter and to whom does it apply? This chapter covers all Service aquatic animal health operations, including managerial and technical responsibilities and applies to all Service personnel.

1.3 What terms do I need to know? [Exhibit 1](#) defines terms that apply to the Aquatic Animal Health Policy.

1.4 What is the Handbook of Aquatic Animal Health Procedures and Protocols? The [Handbook](#) contains detailed procedures and standard protocols to help implement the Aquatic Animal Health Policy. The Aquatic Animal Health Policy Committee will review and revise the [Handbook](#), as necessary, and the Assistant Director - Fisheries and Habitat Conservation will approve and issue all changes and revisions.

1.5 What is the Service's general policy relative to aquatic animal health in the United States?

A. Service aquatic animal health officials and fishery and facility managers will conduct aquatic animal activities in such a manner as to prevent the spread of aquatic animal pathogens into areas where they are not known to occur; eradicate, when feasible, certain serious aquatic animal pathogens; and use procedures as described in the [Handbook](#) for detecting, controlling, and minimizing the impact of aquatic animal pathogens that cannot be eradicated.

B. Service aquatic animal health officials will provide leadership, direction, and technical assistance to enable international agencies, foreign governments, Native American tribes, States, and the private sector to organize and carry out programs to maintain and manage aquatic animal health.

C. As identified by a Service Fish Health Center (FHC) Director, facility managers will culture and utilize healthy, high quality aquatic animals to meet Service fisheries objectives. Service aquatic animal health officials will inspect all Service aquatic animal facilities annually and all primary broodstock hatcheries twice annually, maintaining surveillance of all aquatic animals at all Service facilities for occurrences of pathogens and diseases, as outlined or referred to in this document and/or the [Handbook](#). Service fishery managers will stock only aquatic animals not posing a health threat to natural resources (e.g., undergoing an epizootic of a disease that would likely impact natural populations, etc.).

D. Service aquatic animal health officials may conduct applied research on aquatic animal diseases to: improve pathogen detection and disease diagnostic techniques; develop procedures for hygiene, therapy, and pathogen eradication; improve the disease resistance of cultured aquatic animals; and determine interrelationships of pathogen, host, and environment. If possible, conduct these studies in cooperation with other Federal, State, tribal, and private entities.

E. Service aquatic animal health officials will provide the results of aquatic animal health studies to State, tribal, and private sector cooperators and participate in international, national, and regional aquatic animal health cooperative agreements negotiated with States, tribal governments, and aquaculture associations.

1.6 Who is responsible for implementing the Aquatic Animal Health Policy?

A. The **Assistant Director - Fisheries and Habitat Conservation** via the Service Aquatic Animal Health Policy Committee is responsible for development and maintenance of all Service aquatic animal health policy and procedures and oversees Servicewide implementation of aquatic animal health policy and procedures.

B. Regional Directors are responsible for compliance with the provisions of this policy ([713 FW 1-5](#)) and will:

(1) Ensure that health surveillance is completed on all aquatic animal lots prior to arrival, release, or transfer from Service and Service-contracted facilities (see [Exhibit 1, 713 FW 2](#)).

(2) Authorize the transfer of gametes, fertilized eggs, or aquatic animals to Service broodstock facilities.

(3) Authorize all operations conducted in the Region under the exotic disease eradication plan, including authorizing quarantines as required to contain suspected or confirmed outbreaks of exotic diseases ([713 FW 3](#)).

(4) Inform the Chief, Division of the National Fish Hatchery System of a downgrade in a facility's pathogen designation (sufficient to affect its management plan objectives). Provide written notification of such downgrade to the Director within 5 working days.

(5) Ensure that the Service FHC Director is informed of all proposed gamete, fertilized egg, or aquatic animal transfers to Service facilities within the Region at least 10 working days prior to proposed movement (30 working days are required if additional fish health testing is needed).

(6) Resolve conflicts between this policy and other compacts, policies, agreements, guidelines, and/or contracts with other jurisdictional entities.

C. Service FHC Directors will:

(1) Provide and coordinate aquatic animal health surveillance services to all Service facilities.

(2) Conduct aquatic animal health services in accordance with established cooperative agreements.

(3) Complete Fish Health Inspection Reports ([FWS Form 3-226](#)), maintain the original Inspection Report as the sole archive location, provide copies of the Inspection Report to the inspected facility, and to other appropriate agencies.

(4) Maintain a master inspection record for each facility and aquatic animal stock inspected and immediately report by telephone, email, or fax any changes that result in a downgrade in the pathogen designation to the Regional Director. In addition, immediately notify the Regional Director and potentially affected parties of any disease or infection that may constrain the planned transfer or release of eggs or aquatic animals resulting from Regional policies or area disease control programs not covered by this policy.

(5) Direct field operations of the Eradication Task Force in situations requiring implementation of the exotic disease eradication plan ([713 FW 3](#)).

(6) Meet professional standards equivalent to those of the Fish Health Section of the American Fisheries Society for Fish Health Inspectors or Fish Pathologists.

(7) Annually review current knowledge of aquatic animal pathogens and diseases and recommend to the Aquatic Animal Health Policy Committee any changes to the policy that would improve our ability to eradicate, control, or minimize the impact of aquatic animal diseases and pathogens.

(8) Develop site-specific aquatic animal cultural sanitation and decontamination plans covering the provision of this policy, including the exotic disease eradication plan ([713 FW 3](#)).

D. The Aquatic Animal Health Policy Committee has overall responsibility for the review and revision of the Aquatic Animal Health Policy ([713 FW 1-5](#)), the appropriate sections of 50 CFR (in particular §16.13) and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Handbook of Aquatic Animal Health Procedures and Protocols](#). The Committee will meet at least annually and is comprised of one Service FHC Director from each Region and the National Fish Health Program Coordinator, Division of the National Fish Hatchery System, Headquarters.

E. All Service aquatic animal managers will:

(1) Manage facility operations in compliance with the provisions of this policy.

(2) Coordinate with the Service FHC Director to ensure that gametes, fertilized eggs, and/or aquatic animals (including carcasses) are shipped or accepted (per [Exhibit 1, 713 FW 2](#)) in compliance with this policy, area disease control programs, regional stock transfer policies, and/or regulations of other jurisdictions.

(3) Assist in the development, and comply with, site-specific aquatic animal cultural sanitation and decontamination plans covering the provision of this policy, including the exotic disease eradication plan ([713 FW 3](#)).

(4) Provide a disease history of the lot of aquatic animals upon request from any Service manager prior to transfer or stocking.

F. Other Service Aquatic Resource Managers (e.g., FWO, FRO, NWR, and ES) will:

(1) Ensure that gametes, fertilized eggs, and/or aquatic animals are transferred per [Exhibit 1, 713 FW 2](#), in compliance with this policy, area disease control programs, regional stock transfer policies, and/or regulations of other jurisdictions.

(2) Coordinate with a Service FHC Director to ensure compliance with exotic disease eradication plan ([713 FW 3](#)).

1.7 What are the code of standards by which Service aquatic animal health officials implement the provisions of this chapter?

A. Aquatic animal health officials or their designated Service agent will not issue [FWS Form 3-226](#), unless they have observed the aquatic animals on the facility to detect abnormalities.

(1) Sampling will be conducted to ensure the integrity of sample collection, labeling, and preservation.

(2) The official will not sign [FWS Form 3-226](#) unless all sampling and laboratory work was performed according to procedures set forth or referred to in this policy.

B. Service aquatic animal health officials must identify any inspection work performed by non-Service entities on [FWS Form 3-226](#).

1.8 What specific actions are required when various types of aquatic animal pathogens are detected? The following describes the types of pathogens that may be encountered during diagnostic, monitoring and/or inspection work. Actions to be taken, if detected at Federal facilities, are as follows:

A. Exotic pathogens. The exotic classification requires an historical absence of the pathogen or disease using adequate detection methods as determined by the FHC Director. Not all exotic pathogens that can adversely impact aquatic animals have been specifically identified. Service fishery managers will develop appropriate control and eradication programs dependent upon identification of specific pathogens requiring such action. When laboratory results indicate an unknown agent or exotic pathogen is present within a population, the Service aquatic animal health officials will immediately notify the Regional Director (who will then notify the Director) and affected partners. The affected facility will immediately suspend all shipments to and from the facility. In the event Service aquatic animal health officials confirm the presence of an exotic pathogen, follow procedures in [713 FW 3](#).

B. Listed pathogens. In the event a Service FHC Director confirms the presence of a listed pathogen at a Service facility outside the established geographic range, immediate actions will be taken to prevent its spread ([paragraph 1.9](#)), including notifying and coordinating with affected Service managers and partners.

C. Emerging disease or pathogen. We know that the development of new techniques, along with the culture of new species, may result in the detection of new diseases or pathogens. Upon detection of such an emerging disease or pathogen on a Service facility, the Service aquatic animal health official will immediately contact appropriate Federal, State, and/or tribal authorities, and, if necessary, initiate the organization of an ad hoc committee for the purpose of conducting an emerging disease evaluation action plan. This group will comprise members from the appropriate Fish Health Center and representatives of affected agencies. If Service aquatic animal health officials determine the pathogen to be enzootic, then affected populations may be exempt from destruction, provided that such recommendation leads to effective pathogen containment and minimum risk of spreading the pathogen. The ad hoc committee with concurrence of the Regional Director, may enforce the eradication plan as defined in [713 FW 3](#).

D. Pathogen Eradication Considerations and Strategy. Total destruction of stocks found to harbor a serious pathogen may not always be the most appropriate action. If the affected stock is a threatened or endangered species, a unique genetic stock, or is otherwise highly valuable, it may be more appropriate for Service aquatic animal health officials and facility managers to design a plan to eliminate or control the pathogen without depopulating. The plan should consider

the biology of the pathogen, the facility's environment, size of the stock population (genetic factors), water supply, and other pertinent factors.

1.9 How are Service facilities classified and coded following health inspections or monitoring? A pathogen coding system is an important communications tool used to summarize the results of inspections or regular monitoring of Service facilities and aquatic animal stocks. Designations for stocks and facilities are determined as follows:

A. Class A. Service aquatic animal health officials will assign this designation to aquatic animal stocks and facilities that have been inspected and/or subjected to regular monitoring of freshly dead or moribund aquatic animals for the presence of pathogens listed in this policy and none of the listed pathogens have been detected using the methods identified in the [Handbook](#).

B. Other. Service facilities with aquatic animals found positive for pathogens listed in [Exhibit 2](#) will be given pathogen designation as per [Exhibit 2](#) codes.

C. Classification Criteria.

(1) The Service FHC Director may upgrade a facility found positive for a listed pathogen to a suspect classification (which is designated by placing a lower case "s" in front of the pathogen classification code and must be defined in the remarks block of [FWS Form 3-226](#)) after the first negative inspection following detection. The facility will remain suspect until another negative inspection has occurred following a minimum 12-month period between inspections. Following the second negative inspection, the Service FHC Director will drop the code of the suspect pathogen from the facility classification.

(2) The Service FHC Director will classify facilities that have undergone complete facility depopulation and decontamination as suspect for the prior pathogen(s) code. The Service FHC Director will drop the code of the suspect pathogen(s) upon completion of a minimum of one negative inspection 12 months after repopulation.

(3) Pathogen detection following transfer. The Service FHC Director will:

(a) Add a suspect designation "s" to the pathogen code for a facility receiving properly disinfected eggs from a shipping station, subsequently having a pathogen detected after the shipping date, only if the pathogen has the potential for being vertically transmitted (see paragraph [1.8B](#)). The FHC Director will drop the code of the suspect pathogen upon completion of a minimum of one negative inspection 12 months after receiving suspect eggs.

(b) Add a suspect designation "s" to the pathogen code for a facility receiving aquatic animals from a shipping station, subsequently having a pathogen detected after the shipping date. The Service FHC Director will drop the suspect pathogen code upon completion of a minimum of one negative inspection 12 months after receiving suspect aquatic animals.

(4) List the date of the most recent pathogen detection following the pathogen designation codes. For example, if Coleman National Fish Hatchery tested positive for *Yersinia ruckeri* on July 8, 1993, and received eggs on October 9, 1993, from a facility that later tested positive for infectious hematopoietic necrosis virus (IHNV), the pathogen code would be designated as follows:

Coleman NFH: YR 07-08-93
s-IHNV 10-09-93

(5) Assign separate pathogen designation codes for each activity conducted on all Service facilities with broodstock and production programs provided, the broodstock and production aquatic animals are isolated (see isolation definition in [Exhibit 1](#) and the [Handbook](#)).

For information on the specific content of this chapter, contact the Division of the National Fish Hatchery System. Send problems or comments on this Web page, to [Krista Holloway](#), in the Division of Policy and Directives Management.

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