



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**PROGRAM ASSESSMENT RATING TOOL
PROGRESS EVALUATION**

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**



Y-RR-FWS-0007-2007

June 2008

Portions of this report have been redacted pursuant to
5 U.S.C. 552(b)(5) of the Freedom of Information Act.

ANALYSIS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on its 2005 PART assessment, OMB made a number of recommendations to improve Program operations. The OMB report called on FWS to:

- Improve **Planning** by developing performance measures for long-term outcomes, annual outputs, and efficiency and stepping down those measures into employee performance plans and partner agreements;
- Develop programs for monitoring partner agreements;
- Develop a schedule and process for independent program **Evaluation**; and
- Ensure **Regulations and Policies** help improve the Program's effectiveness by revising the definition of adverse modification and issuing critical habitat guidance.

We reviewed the Program in 2007 and observed progress toward implementing each of these recommendations. We summarize below key actions taken to date and discuss suggestions to further strengthen Program management and improve the Program's next PART assessment. See Appendix D for a complete list of our suggestions.

PLANNING

In this section we discuss 1) the strategic plan; 2) employee performance plans; and 3) partner agreements and provide suggestions to improve strategic planning. By acting on our suggestions, Program officials will be able to establish a clearer and more comprehensive approach to strategic planning.

The Strategic Plan

OMB Recommendation: Develop long-term outcome and annual output performance measures.

OMB Recommendation: Develop and use efficiency measures for key aspects of the program.

For PART purposes, Program performance measures should address:

- **outcomes** — the external results and public benefits intended when carrying out program activities,
- **outputs** — the products and services delivered by the program, and
- **efficiency** — the economical management of resources to produce outputs and achieve outcomes.

In its 2005 PART review of the Endangered Species Program, OMB described the strategic plan (Plan), which is the Program's first, as being "in its infancy." [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

According to the Assistant Director for Endangered Species, FWS officials are pilot-testing the draft Plan in FY2008 and will revise it based on their experience throughout the year. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the Plan before it is submitted to the FWS Director for approval at the end of FY2008. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Table 2 redacted.

[REDACTED]

In the past, the focus had been on species that were close to recovery and on species that were close to extinction. According to the Assistant Director, species in the middle tiers, currently about 850, have lacked attention. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Table 3 redacted.

[REDACTED]

Once the specific baselines and targets have been calculated, the Program will have implemented OMB's recommendations for developing long-term and annual outcome and output measures. With baseline and target numbers set for the efficiency measures, the Program will have the basic tools in place for measuring program performance under PART.



The Threatened Polar Bear
Source: FWS

[REDACTED]

Although Departmental and FWS officials prefer to keep the number of PART measures to a minimum, Program officials should also be prepared to discuss with the OMB examiner which *output* and *efficiency* measure(s) best demonstrate Program results.

SUGGESTION 1

Designate an annual efficiency measure and a minimum of one annual output measure for each outcome.

PART QUESTION 4.1
Has the program demonstrated adequate progress in achieving its long-term performance goals?

[REDACTED]

FWS does not have sole responsibility for meeting the mandates of the ESA [REDACTED]. The cross-cutting nature of implementing the ESA means the ESA is not only about biological science, but also about organizational and political relationships. Effective and fair performance measures should therefore not hold FWS alone accountable for recovery, or focus only on biological measures, but should be developed with consideration of the complex organizational and political context of ESA implementation.

The purpose of the ESA is to provide a means and a program for conservation of endangered and threatened species and their ecosystems. The implied overarching goal is to recover species to a point at which they are no longer at risk of extinction. It does not task DOI (delegated to FWS) with the entire responsibility for recovery, but rather for working with other agencies and organizations to protect terrestrial and freshwater species. The National Wildlife Refuge System, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Forest Service have land on which endangered and threatened species reside, as well as funding to do recovery work on that land; they can influence species recovery and conservation to a high degree. Also, according to Program officials, seventy

Recovery depends on many local, small-scale, private, and public decisions. It is these decisions that are the appropriate focus for improving recovery efforts.

—from *The Endangered Species Act at Thirty*, vol. 1

to eighty percent of endangered species spend at least a portion of their lives on private lands, and while FWS has expanded partnerships with private landowners in the past ten years, it has relatively little authority to force private landowners to take or not take actions.

Accordingly, the function of the FWS Endangered Species Program is to foster the relationships among other organizations and FWS that can, in the long term, result in recovery. Consequently, we believe it is reasonable to assess the Program's effectiveness based on this process work. One official told us that FWS's OMB examiner said the bureau needs to delist more species to both improve their level of success and free up resources to use elsewhere. FWS does have direct responsibility for delisting species. However, there is a difference between delisting a species – taking specific actions through the regulatory process – and doing the recovery work that improves a species' status to the point that it is ready to be delisted. The Program is responsible for the delisting process, but cannot reasonably be held solely responsible for doing all of the recovery work needed by approximately 1,300 freshwater and terrestrial endangered and threatened species.

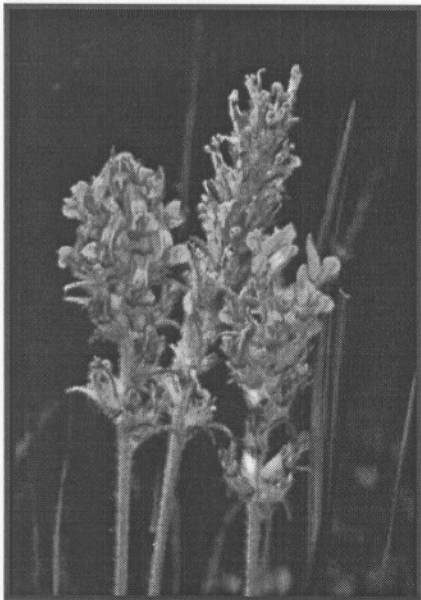
In 1998 the Audubon Society named [John and Frank Craighead] among the top 100 figures in conservation of the 20th century. And this year's delisting from the federal Endangered Species Act of grizzly bears in and around Yellowstone is a direct ripple effect of their legacy...

—from *The Washington Post Magazine*, November 11, 2007

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The states, tribes, NGOs, landowners, businesses, universities, and the public all have essential roles in recovering and conserving species. Yet these partners have their own agendas, assumptions, methodologies, and circumstances over which the federal government has limited influence. Only program grantees and contractors (those who receive federal funds) and federal agencies can be held accountable for meeting Program goals.



The Threatened Fasset's Locoweed
Source: FWS

[REDACTED]

Generally, a logic model identifies who contributes what – the inputs; who does what with those inputs – the activities; what those activities produce – the outputs; the expected benefits or changes that result from those contributions – the outcomes; and the interrelationships among the contributors. For example, one might determine each organization's and individual's resource investments, roles, and responsibilities when implementing the ESA (inputs to the total recovery effort). They could then determine how their activities produced (outputs) fit together to meet the ESA's conservation goals (outcomes). Clearly defining inputs, such as resources invested, will help specify meaningfully targets because the inputs to a well-designed program should produce outputs, the sum of which should result in the program's intended outcomes.

[REDACTED]

¹ See <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html> (January 8, 2008)

[REDACTED]

The logic model template below, used by The United Way, breaks down outcomes into various stages, in a manner similar to the annual and long-term measures required by OMB. See <http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes/>.

Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Initial Outcomes → Intermediate Outcomes → Longer-Term Outcomes

An overall logic model might start with the ESA's purpose and show the FWS Endangered Species Program as one input, or perhaps show different elements of the Program as separate inputs.

SUGGESTION 2

Convene a working group, including an individual or individuals with logic modeling expertise, to develop a high-level logic model for the ESA and a detailed one for the Endangered Species Program within FWS. The working group for developing, not just reviewing, these models should also include a representative group of partners—federal, state, tribal, NGO, and landowner. This would help improve partners' understanding of their impacts (both positive and negative) on the Program and the ESA's intended outcomes, as well as serve to improve cooperation with and among partners in support of the Program's mission. Additionally, the logic model could help demonstrate the Program's complexity and nuances to OMB, as well as the need for its many partners' efforts that support, rather than duplicate, common outcome goals. (See the section on Duplication of Effort on page 23.)

[REDACTED]

SUGGESTION 3

Develop a guide that clearly describes how the regions and field offices need to modify their operations to implement the Plan. This task force should include field office and regional office personnel as well as Washington Office personnel.

The public's ability to sue under the ESA and partners' use of that authority significantly affects other Program activities. Several managers mentioned the effects litigation has on the Program's work. [REDACTED]

According to several officials, court orders drive their priorities, forcing them to take certain actions while neglecting others they would like to take. Litigation also forces FWS to move some lower-priority species ahead of higher-priority ones when considering listing, and missing others entirely. Managers in the regions stated that new court mandates to complete 5-year reviews have created extra work for the field with no additional money or staff. As a result, staff have

less time to work with partners on recovery efforts. Officials in the Washington Office told us that the Program now has people dedicated to handling litigation, which should free their biologists from doing legal reviews. Officials in one regional office told us that they are streamlining how they handle litigation and are working, at the field and regional level, to develop critical habitats that are as “litigation-proof” as possible. [REDACTED]

Employee Performance Plans

OMB Recommendation: Revise individual employee performance plans to include specific, measurable annual and long-term goals.

In response to this recommendation, the FWS Washington Office directed the regional and field offices to rewrite their employee performance plans (EPPs) with measureable objectives that link to the Program’s new annual and long-term goals. OMB stated in the 2005 PART review that the FY2006 EPPs for some regions included specific measurable annual and long-term goals that were stepped down from the DOI Strategic Plan. To gauge progress on this recommendation, we reviewed two samples of EPPs.

The Washington Office asked managers in each of FWS’s eight regions to select EPPs for our review. They provided 32 EPPs representing a variety of positions at various pay grades, including SES positions. All EPPs were for employees specifically assigned to the Endangered Species Program, either in a field or regional office. We gathered a second sample of 25 EPPs during our four field and regional office site visits. This second sample also included various pay grades and positions, but the highest-level position reviewed was regional office manager.



*The Endangered Green Pitcher Plant
Source: Pete Pattavina/FWS*

As shown in Table 4 below, all EPPs sampled contained at least one goal that supported Program or DOI strategic plan goals. For example, one EPP stated, “Work toward a goal of managing species at self-sustaining levels, in cooperation with affected States and others as defined in approved management documents.” This employee goal contributes to the DOI goal of resource protection. These EPPs indicate that the Program is progressing well on linking employee performance to Program and DOI goals.

similar complementary goals.” FWS also relies on the complementary goals of other entities and programs to accomplish its objectives.

Private sector cooperation and leadership will determine the fate of many endangered species.

— *The Endangered Species Act at Thirty, vol. 1*

As a result of our discussions with Program officials and our review of Program documents and outside literature, we view endangered species conservation as a massive and perpetually underfunded task, requiring cooperation among many different groups. Species conservation requires countless organizations and individuals to work in a coordinated manner.



SUGGESTION 15

Institute a formal process to ensure that Program activities are coordinated with those of other organizations that are working on the same species or in the same geographical area. Use the discussion and information presented here when responding to Question 1.3 in the next PART review.