

Ensure Clear, Quantitative Criteria for Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Plans

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Theme: National Resources and Environment

Overview

Goal Statement

- Clarity for when a threatened or endangered species can be downlisted or delisted is important to ensuring that only the appropriate actions are taken to help the species without unnecessary impacts. By September 30, 2019, 100% of all Fish and Wildlife Service recovery plans will have quantitative criteria for what constitutes a recovered species.

Challenge

- The ESA requires that the Service develop and implement recovery plans for the conservation and survival of endangered and threatened species, which incorporate objective, and measureable criteria for recovering listed species.
- The Service defines quantitative criteria as “measurable and objective” per section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act.
- This measure applies to all 565 final recovery plans and thus will require a review of each published recovery plan to determine if the existing criteria is adequately quantitative.

Opportunity

- Recovery plans outline and justify implementation strategies necessary to achieve recovery of endangered and threatened species, such that these species would no longer need the protections of the ESA.
- Recovery plans identify goals and criteria by which to measure a species’ progress toward and achievement of recovery.
- Clear criteria for delisting a species directs resources to activities and actions that will most benefit the listed species.

Goal Structure & Strategies

- For published recovery plans, the Fish and Wildlife Service is reviewing these plans to confirm that each plan provides quantitative criteria.
- For recovery plans under development or not yet initiated, the Fish and Wildlife Service will require quantitative criteria be developed as part of the drafting and finalizing of the recovery plan.
- Recovery plans are public documents and require public engagement before they are finalized. The Fish and Wildlife Service will need to provide an opportunity for public comment on any new or revised criteria proposed for a recovery plan.

Summary of Progress – FY18 Q2

Level of results achieved

- In Q1, based on an initial review, FWS reported that 72% of final species recovery plans have quantitative recovery criteria (407 of 565 final recovery plans). We have further refined our assessment and accounted for removal of species from the list. Our current assessment for Q2 is that 398 of 564 final recovery plans meet the APG.
- Many plans cover multiple species. 1,117 species have final recovery plans, and 808 of those species have recovery plans that include quantitative recovery criteria.

Likelihood of success

- Moderate, due to the size and complexity of the task and the statutory requirements for public review and comment. (Draft revisions to 166 recovery plans, addressing 309 listed species, will need to be developed and then noticed in the Federal Register for public review and comment. Comments will need to be addressed before plan revisions are finalized.)

Basis for the assessment

- Review of all final recovery plans, by species, to determine inclusion of quantitative criteria for what constitutes a recovered species.

Actions planned to ensure achievement of the goal

- Identification of recovery plans that will need to be modified to meet the goal.
- Coordination with Regional and Field Offices with development of reporting and tracking mechanisms.
- Prepare Federal Register notices to solicit comment on revised recovery plans, as needed.

Key Milestones

Milestone Summary

Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
Quarterly Status Review	Q1 FY 2018	met	Initial review is presently underway
Quarterly Status Review	Q2 FY 2018	met	Initial review is complete
Coordination with Regional and Field Offices with development of reporting and tracking mechanisms	Q3 FY 2018		
Quarterly Status Review	Q4 FY 2018		

Key Indicators

- Each quarter, the Fish and Wildlife Service will report on the updated percentage of recovery plans that have quantitative criteria for what constitutes a recovered species.

	FY18 Q1	FY18 Q2	FY18 Q3	FY18 Q4	FY19 Q1	FY19 Q2	FY19 Q3	FY19 Q4
Percent of final species recovery plans with quantitative criteria	72%	71%						
Number of final species recovery plans with quantitative criteria	407	398 *						
Number of final species recovery plans	565	564 **						

Notes:

** The number of final recovery plan with quantitative criteria decreased from Q1 to Q2 due to a reassessment of plans and the removal of species from the list.*

*** The number of FWS recovery plans decreased from Q1 to Q2 due to the removal of a species from the list.*

Data Accuracy and Reliability

- **Means used to verify and validate measured values:** Data is reviewed relative to its historical trends and programmatic context for plausibility, and is personally presented for review by senior officials to Departmental leadership and colleagues on a quarterly basis.
- **Sources for the data:** Program managers provide performance data based on their observations that can include extrapolations of selected representative samples or past history adjusted for observed changing conditions.
- **Level of accuracy required for the intended use of the data:** Performance data is used for management purposes, as a representative indicator of progress in relation to the goal. The accuracy of the data is that which is considered necessary to provide a reasonable representation of the progress made relative to a target or goal for discussion purposes, so as to help:
 - determine if the progress is considered adequate
 - provide understanding of the ability for the processes and methods being implemented to achieve the goal
 - indicate if any further exploration or evaluation is needed to better ensure achievement of the goal; and
 - whether alternative action, including adjusting funding levels, facilities, workforce, IT capabilities, etc., is needed to help better ensure achievement of the goal.
- **Limitations to the data at the required level of accuracy:** Performance data is subject to potential errors from individual observation; miscommunication; and/or differences in qualitative judgement. However, based on multiple review levels and accuracy certifications, these limitations are not significant.
- **How the agency has compensated for such limitations if needed to reach the required level of accuracy:** Data is reviewed relative to its historical trends and programmatic context for plausibility, and is personally presented for review by senior officials to Departmental leadership and colleagues. Senior management and leadership consider this level of accuracy to be acceptable in their use of the data. Past experience in using the data, historical trend and programmatic context assessments, and bureau data quality certifications indicate that the limitations are considered minor and compensating measures are not considered necessary.

Additional Information

Contributing Programs

○ **Contributing Programs within DOI**

- Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Ecological Services – lead
- FWS Fisheries and Aquatic Conservation – engagement in recovery plans for aquatic species; in some cases, leading the recovery planning team
- FWS Migratory Birds – engagement in recovery plans for migratory bird species; in some cases, leading the recovery planning team
- FWS National Wildlife Refuge System – engagement in recovery plans for listed species found on refuge lands; in some cases, leading the recovery planning team
- FWS Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration – engagement in recovery plans to ensure coordination with state wildlife action plans
- Bureau of Land Management – engagement in recovery plan development; in some cases leading the recovery planning team
- National Park Service - engagement in recovery plan development; in some cases leading the recovery planning team
- US Geological Service – engagement in recovery plan development, typically as a technical consultant in terms of species expertise or modeling expertise

Additional Information

Contributing Programs (continued)

- **Contributing Programs / Other Federal Activities (external to DOI):**
 - Association of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) – coordination and communication with the States
 - State Fish and Wildlife Agencies – engagement in recovery plan development; in some cases, leading the recovery planning team
 - Other Federal Agencies – engagement in recovery plan development; in some cases, leading the recovery planning team
 - Tribal organizations – engagement in recovery plan development in cases where listed species occur on Tribal lands

Stakeholder / Congressional Consultations

- This initiative is being pursued due to the general concern of states and the Administration that the criteria for recovering species is not defined in quantitative terms.
- Recovery plans are public documents and require public engagement before they are finalized. The Service will need to provide an opportunity for public comment on any new or revised criteria proposed for a recovery plan.