



Agency Priority Goal Action Plan

Species Status Assessments (SSAs) for Listings with State Input

Goal Leader: James Kurth, Acting Director and Deputy Director for Operations, Fish and Wildlife Service

Deputy Goal Leader: Gary Frazer, Assistant Director, Ecological Services, Fish and Wildlife Service

Overview

Goal Statement

- All Fish and Wildlife Service decisions on species listings under the Endangered Species Act will be informed by state fish and wildlife agencies. By September 30, 2018, 100% of proposed species listings will be based on best available information that includes state input and/or data provided through participation in Species Status Assessments.

Challenge

- Soliciting the best technical expert(s) to provide best available scientific information to inform the status of a species.
- Managing large groups for wide-ranging species for which many states will be involved.
- Participation by state representatives on SSA teams is voluntary. State participation can be through the submission of species data and information for consideration in the SSA, attendance of state representatives in SSA team meetings, or review by state representatives of the draft SSA document.
- Some states do not want to provide their data as it may be subject to release by the FWS under FOIA or may violate state law protecting landowner identity.
- Some states do not have authority over or expertise in invertebrates or plants, which make up the majority of listings.
- Not all SSAs result in proposed rules to list or delist/down list a species. Similarly, not all proposed rules have an associated SSA.

Overview

Opportunity

- The Species Status Assessment provides an opportunity for the FWS to work with the states to compile the best available scientific information about a species.
- States often have the most recent survey and research information about species found within their boundaries.
- Timely engagement early in the process with known species experts will ensure that the best available information and data is considered as part of the rule-making process to list a species under the ESA.

Goal Structure & Strategies

- For on-going SSAs for which a team has already been formed, the FWS will review participation. Many existing SSAs currently have participation from the state's fish and wildlife agency. For those that do not have sufficient state representation, the FWS will contact the respective governor's offices and/or state offices to request participation as soon as possible. For species occurring on Tribal lands, the relevant Tribes will be engaged.
- For new SSAs (those for which a team has not yet been formed), the FWS will contact the respective governor's and/or state offices to request participation in the SSA development. For species occurring on Tribal lands, the relevant Tribes will be engaged.
- State representatives participating in SSA development must be a state employee (i.e., not a contractor) and have relevant expertise in the ecology of the species (or similar species), the ecosystem, or the relevant biological stressors being analyzed.
- Quarterly reporting will be measured by whether states participated in the SSAs as indicated by the submission of species data and information by the states for consideration in the SSA or attendance by state representatives in SSA team meetings or comments provided by states on the draft SSA document.
- There could be times when the FWS invites state participation but the state declines to participate. If so, FWS will document that the state chose not to engage.

Summary of Progress – FY18 Q4

Level of results achieved

- All active Species Status Assessments (SSAs) in support of completed or anticipated FY 2018 listing decisions include state participation via invitations to participate in the SSA development, solicitation of information, and/or completing partner reviews of draft materials.

Likelihood of success

- **Achieved.** All active Species Status Assessments (SSAs) in support of completed or anticipated FY 2018 listing decisions include state participation.

Basis for the assessment

- Inclusion of state expert representatives in the SSA process is integral to the success of the effort. This agency priority goal is consistent with program goals regarding use of the best available science in our decisions.

Actions planned to ensure achievement of the goal

- Director's Memo to Regional leadership outlining expectations related to state involvement in SSAs. Status: Completed. (Memo issued January 16, 2018)
- Step-down guidance for the Ecological Services Program regarding implementation of the Director's Memo and Agency Priority Goal. Status: Completed. (Memo issued May 16, 2018.)

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 |
| Review of State participation in on-going SSA teams | Q3 FY 2018 | met | There are approximately 70 active SSAs in support of future listing decisions, all of which include some degree of state participation |
| Solicitation of States for appropriate state participation in on-going (if needed) and new SSA teams | Q3 FY 2018 | met | |
| Quarterly Status Review | Q4 FY 2018 | met | Achieved goal -- All active Species Status Assessments (SSAs) in support of completed or anticipated FY 2018 listing decisions include state participation. |

Key Indicators

| | FY18 Q1 | FY18 Q2 | FY18 Q3 | FY18 Q4 | FY18 Final |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------|
| Percent of SSAs, used in conjunction with a proposed listing, based on best available information that includes state input and/or data provided through participation in the SSA | N/A | 100% | 100%* | 100%* | 100% |
| Number of SSAs, used in conjunction with a proposed listing, with state participation, input and/or data in the SSA | N/A | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Total number of SSAs used in conjunction with a proposed listing rule | N/A | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

*No new actions (new SSAs) were completed in Q3 or Q4. **About seventy SSAs are underway with state participation.**

Data Accuracy and Reliability

Means used to verify and validate measured values: Review of SSA team meeting notes, emails, and letters to determine whether State data and/or input was provided.

Sources for the data: FWS meeting notes, emails or letters to/from States

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/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

- Fish and Wildlife Service:
 - Ecological Services – lead
 - Fisheries and Aquatic Conservation – engagement in SSAs for aquatic species
 - Migratory Birds – engagement in SSAs for migratory bird species
- National Park Service - engagement in SSAs for species occurring on NPS lands
- Bureau of Land Management - engagement in SSAs for species occurring on BLM lands
- US Geological Service – providing technical advisory services as species experts, modeling experts, etc.
- Association of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) – coordination and communication with the States
- State Fish and Wildlife Agencies – engagement in SSAs upon request
- Representative(s) designated by State Governors – engagement in SSAs upon request
- Tribes - engagement in SSAs for species occurring on Tribal lands
- National Forest Service - engagement in SSAs for species occurring on USFS lands

Additional Information

Stakeholder Consultations

- This goal is being pursued due to the general concern of states and the Administration that there is not adequate state representation on SSAs.
- FWS will extend an invitation to the Governor and/or appropriate state agency to designate a state employee with the scientific expertise needed to inform the SSA. State representatives participating in SSA development must be a state employee (i.e., not a contractor) and have relevant expertise in the ecology of the species (or similar species), the ecosystem, or the relevant biological stressors being analyzed.
- Invitations for participation shall be extended to the Governor's office and/or the state agency that has jurisdiction over the species to identify a state employee with necessary expertise to participate in the SSA development. In most cases, the state agency with jurisdiction will be the state fish and wildlife agency, but in some cases may be another state agency, such as a department of agriculture or natural resources. For species occurring on Tribal lands, the relevant Tribes will be engaged.
- Quarterly reporting will be measured by whether states participated in the SSAs as indicated by the submission of species data and/or information by the states for consideration in the SSA or attendance by state representatives in SSA team meetings or comments provided by states on the draft SSA document.
- There could be times when the FWS invites state participation but the state declines to participate. If so, FWS will document that the state chose not to engage.