



Addendum to the HCP Handbook

Executive Summary

The joint Fish and Wildlife Service/National Marine Fisheries Service addendum to the HCP handbook (the “5-point policy”) focuses on the expanded use and integration of five components of the Habitat Conservation Planning program, namely (1) biological goals, (2) adaptive management, (3) monitoring, (4) permit duration, and (5) public participation. The purpose of this addendum is to promote nationwide efficiency, effectiveness, and consistency within and between the Services, and to enhance the HCP program nationwide. These new initiatives are based on current operating conservation programs (i.e., habitat conservation measures) the Services and permittees are incorporating into HCPs, lessons learned, recommendations received, and methods the Services are using to strengthen the HCP process to help ensure species conservation. The Services’ new guidance was published in the Federal Register on June 1, 2000.

Biological Goals and Objectives

The Services will work with the applicant to derive biological goals that are commensurate with the scope of the proposed action to ensure that they are consistent with conservation actions needed. Biological goals are the broad guiding principles for the operating conservation program; they are the rationale behind the minimization and mitigation strategies. Specific biological objectives are the measurable targets for achieving the biological goals.

The Services believe that HCPs will be strengthened if they have biological goals and objectives integrated into the operating conservation program. The practice of defining biological goals for HCPs facilitates the development of conservation strategies that ensure that the implementation of the HCP will succeed. These goals and objectives must be based on the best scientific information available and reflect the conservation needs of the covered species for an operating conservation program.



Young northern spotted owls. USFWS photo

Adaptive Management

Adaptive management is an integrated method for addressing uncertainty. It can be used to examine alternative strategies for meeting the biological goals and objectives of an HCP. The Services are already incorporating adaptive management provisions into the operating conservation plans of many HCPs (See the Services’ HCP Handbook, Chapter 3). In an HCP, adaptive management will include mutually agreed upon boundaries for its application.

Not all HCPs or all species covered in an incidental take permit need an adaptive management strategy. However, an adaptive management strategy is essential for HCPs that would otherwise pose a significant risk to the species due to significant data or information gaps. Possible significant data gaps that could lead to the development of an

adaptive management strategy include, but are not limited to, significant biological uncertainty about specific information about the ecology of the species or its habitat (e.g., food preferences, relative importance of predators, territory size), habitat or species management techniques, or the degree of potential effects of the activity on the species covered in the incidental take permit.

Monitoring

Monitoring serves not only to ensure compliance and gauge the effect and effectiveness of HCPs, it also informs choices under adaptive management provisions, assists in redefining biological goals, and provides the Services with an important part of the information used to conduct range-wide assessments of species status and baseline conditions.

There are at least two types of HCP monitoring: (1) compliance monitoring, which monitors the permittee's implementation of the requirements of the HCP permit, and/or Implementation Agreement; and (2) effects and effectiveness monitoring, which investigates the impacts of the authorized take and the operating conservation program implemented to verify progress toward the biological goals and objectives. A monitoring program should incorporate both types in order to examine effectively all aspects of an HCP, and ensure the ultimate success of the HCP

Monitoring measures should be commensurate with the scope and duration of the project and the biological significance of its effects. The monitoring program should be flexible so that it can be modified, if necessary, based on the need for additional information. In order to obtain meaningful information, the applicant and the Services should structure monitoring methods and standards so that the results from one reporting period and area to another are comparable, and the monitoring protocol responds to the question(s) asked. Credible monitored units should reflect the biological objective's measurable units (e.g., if the biological objective is in terms of numbers of individuals, the monitoring program should measure the number of individuals). The monitoring program must be based on sound science and standard survey or other protocols previously established should be used.

Permit Duration

To date, the Services have issued more than 300 permits, with varying lengths in permit duration. Having a range of permit durations is important, as it takes into account both the biological impacts resulting from the proposed land use (e.g., variations in the length of timber rotations and treatments) and economic developmental differences (e.g., housing development HCPs versus forestry-related HCPs).

Both FWS and NMFS regulations for incidental take permits outline factors to consider when determining incidental take permit duration (50 CFR §§17.32 and 222.307). These factors include duration of the applicant's proposed activities and the expected positive and negative effects on covered species associated with the proposed duration including the extent to which the operating conservation program will increase the survivability of the listed species and/or enhance its habitat. In determining the duration of an incidental take permit, the Services will also consider the extent of scientific and commercial data underlying the proposed operating conservation program for the HCP, the



Gopher tortoise. USFWS photo by Harold Waalquist

length of time necessary to implement and achieve the benefits of the operating conservation program, and the extent to which the program incorporates adaptive management strategies.

Public Participation

The Services intend to expand public participation in the HCP process in order to provide the public with a greater opportunity to assess, review, and critique plans as they are being developed. The Services currently require a 30-day public comment period for all formal HCP applications, however, the Services recognize the concern of the general public regarding the length of the public comment period, especially for large-scale HCPs. The Services will provide a 60-day public comment period for most HCPs. The exceptions to a 60-day comment period would be those for low-effect HCPs and large scale regional, or exceptionally complex HCPs. The Services believe the current 30-day public comment period provides enough time to review amendments and low-effect HCPs. In some cases, individual permits under a programmatic HCP may not need additional public review since the larger, programmatic HCP would have undergone more extensive review. In addition, the minimum comment period for these HCPs is proposed to be 90 days, unless significant public participation occurs during HCP development.

In addition to extending the public comment period, the Services will also seek to announce the availability of HCPs in local newspapers of general circulation and in electronic format on an increased basis. The

Services also intend to expand the use of informational meetings to provide a forum for answering questions that members of the public may have regarding HCPs that are large-scale regional plans and/or may be controversial. Although the development of an HCP is the applicant's responsibility, the Services will encourage applicants for most large-scale, regional HCP efforts to provide extensive opportunities for public involvement during the planning and implementation process.

Copies of the addendum may be viewed and printed from the HCP website at <http://endangered.fws.gov/hcp/>. Copies may also be obtained by calling the FWS Division of Endangered Species at 703/358 2171 or the NMFS Office of Protected Resources at 301/713 1401.

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
National Oceanic & Atmospheric
Administration**

May 2000