

## **Subject Editors**

### *Value to Your Profession and Agency*

The standards of Service journals are enforced in large measure by peer review of manuscripts. By coordinating peer reviews, Subject Editors make important contributions to Service publications and thus to the conservation profession. The technical standard for research articles in the Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management (JFWM) should be state of the art or better (requirements for Notes and Data Series are somewhat less rigorous—see Guide for Authors for details). State of the art differs among disciplines, and it is partly for this reason that Subject Editors are selected along disciplinary lines. An equally important reason is to help expand the reviewer base for the journals. As a Subject Editor, your impact will be largely hidden but very important. We hope you will promote Service journals among your colleagues both at home and as you travel. The only way to maintain and improve each journal's quality is to stimulate a flow of good papers and to increase its readership.

### *Job Description*

As a Service Subject Editor, you are expected to (1) solicit high-quality peer reviews of the manuscripts assigned to you, (2) advise the Editor-in-Chief about the disposition of assigned manuscripts by means of a thorough written evaluation or interpretation of the reviews, (3) assist the Editor-in-Chief with reviews of revised manuscripts, when requested, and (4) offer your counsel on editorial policy and the review process to the Editor-in-Chief and the Service's editorial staff.

You are encouraged to be an emissary for the journals by soliciting good papers when opportunities arise. Never imply that publication is assured or that you will be the person to oversee the review, but when you encounter good work, spread the word that we will be very receptive to it and give it a thorough critique. DO NOT submit your own papers to the journals. We'll attempt to obtain timely high-quality reviews for your papers. Your guidance about the Subject Editor who might best handle the reviews for your paper would also be appreciated.

Your manuscript load is hard to gauge at this early stage in the development of the new Service system. We anticipate it will average anywhere from two manuscripts per year to two per month, depending on the manuscript flow and your own area of expertise. Related manuscripts in one subject area often arrive in bunches, and a few months of heavy work may be followed by several months of low or no activity.

To keep the review system from becoming bogged down, be sure to alert the Editor-in-Chief if you find your workload has become too heavy. If you will be unavailable for an extended period (more than 2 weeks), please click on "Modify Availability Dates" on your "home page." Silence on your part means all is well!

### *Term of Service*

Subject Editors are expected to serve at least a 1-year term. Experienced Subject Editors are valuable to the editorial process, and those who do well are often invited to continue for additional terms. Some turning over each year will help maintain a balance between experience and fresh enthusiasm.

### *Procedures for Manuscript Review*

Please familiarize yourself with your journal's online manuscript tracking system (AllenTrack). You will need an up-to-date web browser and an Adobe Acrobat Reader to read PDF files. If you have any questions on using the system, don't hesitate to call the Anne Roy at 304-876-7399.

### *Manuscript Submission*

Manuscripts are submitted to the journal online via the AllenTrack manuscript tracking system. Authors submit their manuscripts to a specific Service journal. We seldom suggest a different journal at this initial stage; however, a journal switch might be recommended by the Editor-in-Chief, the Subject Editor, or the reviewers at any time during the review process. The system logs in the manuscript and gives it a unique number; for example, JFWM03-079 designates the 79th manuscript received in the year 2003 (each year begins at 001) for Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management. The journal codes are:  
JFWM = Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management,  
NAF = North American Fauna, and  
MARS = Manuscript Administrative Record System.

The AllenTrack system automatically assigns Subject Editors based on matching of their areas of expertise and the subject areas identified by the author during submission. The match between subject and Subject Editor may be imperfect—sometimes a paper does not fit any established specialty, and sometimes the most appropriate Subject Editor is overburdened, unavailable, or one of the authors. You are likely to get a few papers that “stretch” you; we hope you'll persevere with them, but feel free to ask for a reassignment whenever necessary. The Editor-in-Chief will have the final authority to decide the fate of the reviewed paper, but we will rely heavily on your decision and it will be overturned only in rare cases.

When you are assigned a manuscript, you will receive an e-mail advising you of the assignment and linking you to the manuscript. You may also log on to your “home page,” where you will see a link highlighted by a red arrow for the newly assigned manuscript. If you click on the link, you will be able to view or download PDF files of the author's cover letter, the manuscript, and any figures and tables. We send an acknowledgment e-mail to the author, which does not reveal the Subject Editor's name; indeed, we will never reveal your name to an author without your permission. Conversely, please do not contact an author without checking with the Editor-in-Chief first, and NEVER suggest to an author that a

paper will be accepted (or rejected); that decision rests solely with the Editor-in-Chief.

### *Setup and Initial Decisions*

You should first read through the complete manuscript to decide, based on your own expertise, whether or not it is ready for peer review. You need not send every manuscript out for review. If you believe a paper is fundamentally flawed, has little or no technical merit or that it is so badly written that no reviewer should be burdened with it, please use the “Recommendation without Review” function to make your recommendation to the Editor-in-Chief. We ask you to try to obtain two high-quality reviews of each manuscript. At least initially, while we build our reviewer database, the authors will assist in this process by providing three or more potential reviewers for each submission. If the subject matter is so unfamiliar to you that you are unable to identify appropriate reviewers, contact the Editor-in-Chief immediately. We will assist or reassign the manuscript to another Subject Editor. Also let us know if we have inadvertently assigned you a manuscript for which you will be unable to act as a disinterested evaluator—perhaps you already commented on an earlier draft of the paper or the author is a recent employee or student of yours.

Our ideal schedule for manuscript review is to take no more than 45 days (6 weeks) from the time a properly prepared manuscript is submitted to the time the Editor-in-Chief’s evaluation is returned to the author. Thus, we ask you to log into the system and select reviewers within a couple days of receiving a new assignment.

### *Soliciting Reviews*

To avoid reviewer burnout, try to refrain from using the same reviewer more than once or twice a year. If you exhaust your personal network of colleagues, there are other ways to locate referees. You may want to use the reviewer database on the AllenTrack system, which includes the Service database of members’ areas of expertise. You may have success with reviews by sending one copy to a person you know would do a good job (based on experience), another copy to a person you think would do well (based on reputation), and the third to someone working in the author's field whom you know nothing about. You may discover some good reviewers by this process without jeopardizing the likelihood of at least two good reviews. Selecting someone who is at the interface between the topic of the manuscript and some other field may prove fruitful. Surprisingly, this frequently provided the most insightful reviews. Graduate students will often provide excellent critiques and can be used for a third or fourth review. Students are accustomed to sharing ideas with their peers, so be sure to stress the importance of confidentiality if you use a student reviewer. If the statistics used in the paper fall outside your realm of expertise, be sure to select at least one reviewer who is qualified to evaluate the statistical application and interpretation. If a reviewer you have selected declines to review the paper or does not respond promptly to the e-mails you send, you should enter additional potential reviewers.

Although the Editor-in-Chief needs only two high-quality reviews to make a decision (one of which may be your own), many Subject Editors routinely solicit three or more reviews with the expectation that two will be of high quality. For that reason, we have set the AllenTrack system for three reviewers. If you change the “number of reviewers” to two, only two of your invited reviewers will be allowed to accept the invitation to review the paper. The third will get a “review not needed” response if they try to accept. If you have solicited three reviews, please monitor the system frequently. Although you won’t be prompted to complete your recommendation until the three reviews have been received, you can (and often should) draft your evaluation and send it to the Editor-in-Chief at any time, regardless of the number of reviews completed.

#### *Timeliness Versus a Full Complement of Reviews*

Even though Subject Editors need only two high-quality reviews to evaluate a manuscripts, soliciting three reviews has several advantages. It keeps a single delinquent referee from derailing the whole process (judgment cannot be made on the basis of one review), it can break a deadlock between two conflicting reviews, and, even if it is late, a third critique can provide additional benefit during the revision process. As soon as you have two good, non-conflicting reviews, submit your evaluation the Editor-in-Chief; the third review will be sent when (if) it materializes. The online system has a provision for sending out e-mail reminders to reviewers who haven’t submitted their reviews by the end of the 3-week review period. These reminders (called “chasers” in the system) are not sent automatically but are triggered by the assigned Subject Editor. If, after 4 weeks, you have received only one review or two or three conflicting or inadequate reviews, please serve as a reviewer yourself or ask a local colleague to help. We’ll expect such detailed reviews from you only when other referees let you down; however, you are welcome to be a principal reviewer for any paper that attracts your interest. Remember that unpublished manuscripts are the intellectual and copyrighted property of the authors or their employers. DO NOT discuss or distribute a manuscript submitted for publication with anyone other than those who are or who will be performing the review. DO NOT use a manuscript under review as a classroom or graduate student training exercise without first making arrangements with the Editor-in-Chief. DO NOT discuss the status or reviewers’ comments of a manuscript with the author before you receive the Editor-in-Chief’s evaluation letter. The Editor-in-Chief has the final say about the disposition of a manuscript, and they sometimes uncover flaws (or information worth extracting) in a manuscript that were not detected by the Subject Editor or the reviewers. The Editor-in-Chief’s job will be considerably more difficult if you have led the author to expect an outcome that differs from their decision.

#### *Recommendations to the Editor-In-Chief*

The Editor-in-Chief depends strongly on your summary opinion of the manuscript and your interpretation of the reviews, particularly when the reviews appear to be conflicting. Your Recommendation page has separate boxes for comments

intended for the Editor-in-Chief only and those that will be forwarded to the author. Please be careful to enter your comments in the appropriate box. When reviewers' comments conflict, advise the Editor-in-Chief which ones you think are the more technically correct. You may want to advise the Editor-in-Chief about the need for additional review once the manuscript has been revised. Important as your comments are, try not to let your summary letter to the Editor-in-Chief be a point of delay in the review process; if you can't get to it within a week, and the reviews are thorough, quickly fill out the form without extra comments and suggest the Editor-in-Chief contact you if additional advice is needed.

As previously mentioned, the Editor-in-Chief has the final say about the disposition of a manuscript. The Editor-in-Chief may occasionally decide to reverse the recommendations of the Subject Editor and the reviewers, or may decide to reconsider a previously rejected paper if the author is able to provide convincing rebuttal to the reviewers' criticisms. Although the Editor-in-Chief may or may not consult with the Subject Editor about a change in disposition of a manuscript, we do encourage them to keep you informed about such changes by forwarding copies of their correspondence with the author to you.

#### *Follow-up With Reviewers*

Be sure to express your appreciation to colleagues who provide reviews for you. Your note of thanks and a listing in the journal are the only tangible rewards they get for their services. Reviewers receive a note of thanks from the journal when they submit their reviews, but a more personal note is always appreciated. Later, when the Editor-in-Chief has decided the fate of a manuscript you've handled, you'll receive a copy of the decision that was sent to the author. A similar e-mail is sent to your reviewers. Also, circulating the reviews, including your own summary, among the reviewers can give them a greater sense of involvement and, ultimately, may help improve the quality of reviews.

#### *Editorial Office Services*

The Editor-in-Chief of the journal and Anne Roy, the System Administrator, are your best contacts for resolving problems, asking questions, making suggestions or voicing concerns. Contact them if you have any questions about specific manuscripts or general Service policies or procedures.

We hope you will find your service as Subject Editor to be both personally and professionally rewarding. We are pleased that you've joined us, and we look forward to working with you.