282 FW 2

Managing Correspondence and Official Documents

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Originating Office: Correspondence Control Unit

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2.1 What is the purpose of this chapter? This chapter explains how we control, track, and locate correspondence and other official documents. It also introduces two handbooks:

A. The Service *Correspondence Handbook*, and

B. The *Data Tracking System (DTS) User Manual*.

2.2 What are the objectives of this chapter? Our objectives are to provide an efficient and organized method for managing correspondence and other official documents that leads to:

A. Timely responses to inquiries, and

B. Accountability for quality.

2.3 What is the scope of this chapter? The chapter applies to:

A. Incoming correspondence addressed to the Director,

B. Correspondence the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks and the Executive Secretariat refer to the Service,

C. All outgoing correspondence that the Director signs or surnames, and

D. Other documents that the Director or other officials must sign.

2.4 What are the authorities for this chapter? The authorities for this chapter are 382 DM 3 and 5, Correspondence Management and Secretarial Correspondence.

2.5 Who is responsible for managing correspondence and official documents for the Service?

A. The **Deputy Director** oversees correspondence and document management and supervises the Correspondence Control Unit (CCU) in Headquarters.

B. Assistant Directors and Regional Directors:

(1) Ensure that correspondence for which their office is responsible is timely, responsive, and reflects the full and balanced interests of the Service, and

(2) Appoint administrative staff in their offices to track correspondence and official documentation.

C. Headquarters (HQ) Division Chiefs:

(1) As necessary, prepare correspondence requiring the Director's surname or signature;

(2) Ensure that responses to incoming correspondence are complete, accurate, and meet our standards for plain language (see 116 FW 1);

(3) Obtain necessary surnames and send final surname packages through their Assistant Director so they arrive in CCU by scheduled due dates; and

(4) Appoint a point of contact to work with CCU. When the division is the originating office for correspondence or other official documentation, the point of contact:

(a) Initiates DTS entries, and

(b) Downloads DTS packages and creates a hard copy package.

D. Regional Office staff:

(1) As necessary, prepare correspondence requiring the Director's surname or signature;

(2) Ensure that responses to incoming correspondence are complete, accurate, and meet our standards for plain language (see 116 FW 1); and

(3) Obtain necessary Regional surnames, upload the complete package into DTS, and route it to CCU by scheduled due dates. (CCU downloads DTS packages to create a hard copy.)

E. CCU is the point of contact for the Director's Office for tracking correspondence. It is responsible for maintaining accurate, up-to-date information on the status of correspondence and other official documentation. CCU:

(1) Receives and controls all significant correspondence addressed to the Director, including but not limited to:

(a) Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests,

(b) Incoming letters from the public, and

(c) Correspondence the Assistant Secretary and the Executive Secretariat refer to the Director;

(2) Is the system owner for DTS (see section 2.6);

(3) Initiates DTS entries for correspondence coming into the Director's office and may initiate DTS entries for correspondence going out of the Director's office;

(4) Through DTS, distributes routine inquiries and correspondence for appropriate action;

(5) Alerts the Director's Office early about correspondence that may be controversial, time sensitive, or high profile;

(6) Follows up with designated correspondence contacts on overdue correspondence; and

(7) Obtains all required Departmental surnames for correspondence that the Executive Secretariat controls.

2.6 What terms do you need to know to understand this chapter?

A. Data Tracking System. DTS is a secure, Web-based information technology system we use to:

(1) Assign correspondence for action,

(2) Assign surname packages we prepare for other reasons (e.g., surname packages for new or revised Service Manual chapters, Director's Orders, technical reports, etc.), and

(3) Track correspondence and other packages.

B. Surname package. A surname package is a file we assemble for officials to review to indicate they either concur or do not concur with the content of a written document.

2.7 What should employees put in DTS?

A. What Belongs in DTS: Employees may use DTS to track any document they want to track (see the *DTS User Manual* for detailed information on how to use the system). DTS has a special database for sensitive material (confidential records, etc.), so you may put documents that have privacy implications in DTS. Examples of documents that we enter into DTS include, but are not limited to:

(1) Correspondence,

(2) Directives,

(3) <u>Federal Register</u> notices and rules,

(4) Public, Servicewide, or Regionwide outreach material that Service officials need to review, and

(5) Technical reports that require official approval (e.g., Comprehensive Conservation Planning Reports).

B. What Does Not Belong in DTS: Examples of documents that we should not put into DTS include, but are not limited to:

(1) Individual Development Plans and performance reviews,

(2) Meeting minutes that only a small group of people need to access,

(3) Draft correspondence and reports that are still undergoing review within a division, and

(4) Copies of internal email correspondence.

2.8 Who receives incoming correspondence for the Service, and how do they

determine to what office to assign it for response?

A. CCU receives most incoming correspondence for the Service. Regional offices and field stations may also receive correspondence addressed to officials in those organizations. Regional offices and field stations are responsible for establishing procedures for correspondence within their organizations and may use DTS to track it.

B. In general we delegate the preparation of a response as far down in the organization as possible. Table 2-1 shows specific guidelines CCU follows.

Table 2 1: How CCU determines assignments	
CCU assigns this type of correspondence…	**To…**
(1) Inquiries that pertain to just one Region or are specific to a particular field station's operation.	The affected Regional office.
(2) Inquiries that cross Regions or are national in scope (e.g., national policy).	The appropriate Assistant Director, unless a Regional Director is the lead on the issue.

2.9 Who determines who must sign correspondence for the Service? For correspondence addressed to the:

A. Secretary, the Executive Secretariat assigns the signature levels.

B. Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks (FWP), FWP assigns signature levels.

C. Director, CCU assigns signature levels.

2.10 What are the signature levels within the Service for outgoing correspondence and official documents?

A. Table 2-2 shows the signature levels CCU uses for the different types of correspondence. In some circumstances, more than one official is authorized to sign.

Table 2 2: Signature levels in the Service				
	Who May Sign…			
Document	**Director**	**Responsible Assistant Director**	**Regional Director**	**HQ Division Chief**
(1) Service policy statements and directives	X			
(2) Most assignments to the Directorate	X			
(3) Routine data collection not requiring significant effort (see 050 FW 3) and information transmittal to the Regions		X		
(4) Memoranda addressed to the Assistant Secretary – FWP; Chief of Staff; Deputy Secretary; and Secretary	X			

(5) Memoranda addressed to the Director's counterparts at other bureaus or other Federal agencies	X			
(6) Correspondence to the Chairs of our authorizing and appropriations committees and subcommittees in Congress	X			
(7) Correspondence that is national in scope and addressed to members of Congress, Governors, State fish and wildlife directors, or heads of national conservation organizations**	X			
(8) Correspondence that is specific to a Region and addressed to members of Congress, Governors, State fish and wildlife directors, or heads of national conservation organizations		X	X	
(9) Mail addressed specifically or personally to the Director**	X			
(10) Correspondence from the public about specific Regional issues			X	
(11) Correspondence relating to inquiries about implementing national policy, program operations, routine reporting requirements, or requests for technical comments		X		
(12) Responses to routine requests for comments or information that do not establish a Service position on the matter.				X

** The Director may delegate signature authority to an Assistant or Regional Director.

B. Delegations: The Director, Assistant Directors, and Regional Directors may assign their signature authority to their Deputies on a case-by-case basis.

C. Elevations: When an Assistant Director, Regional Director, or HQ Division Chief who has signature authority for a matter encounters a precedent-setting or controversial issue, he/she should elevate the response and inform CCU accordingly.

2.11 How does the Service establish schedules for correspondence?

A. Who Establishes Schedules. As Table 2-3 summarizes, the same organization that determines who must sign correspondence also sets the schedule.

Table 2 3: Who establishes schedule	
When this office receives correspondence…	**This office establishes the schedule for response...**
(1) Office of the Secretary	Executive Secretariat
(2) Assistant Secretary – FWP	FWP
(3) The Service Director	CCU

B. Standard Schedules Used to Prepare Responses. In most cases, the schedules established depend on many factors, such as the complexity of the request and legal

requirements. In some cases, we are able to follow standard schedules (see Table 2-4).

Table 2 4: Standard Schedules for Correspondence		
Correspondence received from the…	**With this level of signature…**	**We have this much time to respond…**
(1) White House through the Department	President	5 working days
(2) Office of the Secretary	A Higher Level than the Director	10 working days
(3) Assistant Secretary – FWP	Assistant Secretary – FWP	10 working days
(4) Office of the Secretary or the Assistant Secretary – FWP	Director	10 working days
(5) CCU	Director or other official in the Service	15 working days

C. Typical Interim Due Dates to Meet Response Schedules. In most circumstances, a Division or Regional office prepares the draft response and sends it through the appropriate channels for surname and final signature. For responses that the Director must surname or sign:

(1) An HQ Division usually has 10 working days to prepare the response, obtain the necessary surnames, and send the document through their Assistant Director to CCU.

(2) A Region usually has 10 working days to prepare a draft response and send it to CCU, CCU then finalizes the packet, obtains required surnames, and sends it to the appropriate office for action.

D. Getting Extensions.

(1) Only CCU, often working with the Director's office, may grant extensions for correspondence that the Director signs.

(2) You must coordinate with CCU for extension requests for assignments originating from the Executive Secretariat or FWP.

2.12 How do offices prepare responses to incoming correspondence?

A. Project Leaders, Division Chiefs, and Assistant and Regional Directors ensure that the correspondence their staff prepares is:

(1) Substantively accurate,

(2) Editorially correct and in plain language,

(3) Responsive to the inquiry, and

(4) Completed within the necessary timeframe.

B. When an office cannot provide a full response by the assigned due date, the office may

prepare an interim letter for signature.

(1) The note to reviewers in the surname package for the interim letter must include an explanation of the reason(s) for the delay.

(2) The signature level for the interim reply is usually the same as for the final response. However, there are exceptions for Congressional mail and for Secretarial responses. Employees should contact CCU with questions.

C. Employees may find more information on writing correspondence and official documents in:

(1) The Service's *Correspondence Handbook*,

(2) The Secretarial Correspondence Handbook (382 DM 5) and bulletins,

(3) The *Government Printing Office Style Manual*, and

(4) 116 FW 1, Plain Language in Fish and Wildlife Service Documents.

2.13 How does the Service log in and distribute correspondence and official documentation in DTS?

A. Incoming Correspondence: CCU:

(1) Logs into DTS all correspondence for which we must prepare a response. See the *DTS User Manual* for more information and procedures for logging in, searching for, and assigning documents.

(2) Assigns the action to the appropriate office or Region, the due dates, and appropriate signature level. CCU checks the box in DTS that generates an automatic email to the responsible office/Region to ensure they are aware of the assignment.

(3) The office that prepares the response determines the surname requirements (see sections 2.14 and 2.15). Employees should contact CCU with questions about what officials must surname outgoing correspondence.

B. Other Correspondence and Official Documents:

(1) The originating office logs into DTS correspondence they originate and other official documents going through the surname process (e.g., official reports).

(2) CCU is the last office in the routing chain before official documents go to the Director's office. CCU sends these documents to the Director's office for signature.

2.14 How does the surname process work?

A. The Surname Package.

(1) If a response is coming from an office in HQ, that office prepares a surname package. The surname package is a folder that includes:

(a) A DTS-generated control slip stapled to the front of the folder.

(b) On the left-hand side of the folder:

(i) Note to reviewers explaining the document,

(ii) Copy of any incoming correspondence, and

(iii) Any other relevant material (e.g., applicable policy, reports, etc.).

(c) On the right-hand side of the folder:

(i) The response in draft (the originating office should upload all responses and related material into DTS before the package is sent out of the office).

(ii) A yellow copy of the response with a surname stamp in the upper, right-hand corner of the first page and a flag indicating where to sign and date. (This is where officials sign their names to show their concurrence with the document.) If the office uses DTS to obtain surnames electronically, the office should print the surnames and update the hard copy package.

(iii) For correspondence signed by officials above the Director, the office must print the draft response on the "Office of the Secretary" yellow draft paper with ladder. Contact CCU for more information.

(2) If the response is coming from a Region, then the Region uploads the elements of the surname package in DTS and assigns the document to CCU for appropriate action.

(3) Surname packages for <u>Federal Register</u> documents, Directives, and Briefing Papers are compiled differently from correspondence packages. See <u>202 FW 4</u> for <u>Federal Register</u> documents, <u>011 FW 3</u> for Directives, and the <u>Briefing Paper Web site</u> for more information.

B. Intra-Service Coordination.

(1) Division Chiefs must ensure that the appropriate people in their organization have reviewed draft responses before sending them to other program offices for review and surname.

(2) Assistant Directors for the divisions preparing responses must:

(a) Verify that appropriate coordination took place within a division, and

(b) Review and surname the document or send it back to the division for revision.

(3) Regional Directors must ensure that draft responses reflect the input from and coordination with other affected Regions when acting as a lead Region.

(4) The Regional Director must review and approve all draft responses that their offices prepare.

(5) If another office or the Director's office makes a substantive change to correspondence that the Region prepares, CCU will notify the Regional Director about the change. CCU must

ensure that the latest version of the document is uploaded in DTS.

(6) CCU ensures that the office preparing the correspondence obtained proper clearances before it gives the package to the Director for signature or surname.

C. General Guidelines for Officials Surnaming Correspondence:

(1) The HQ programs responsible for the correspondence must obtain all Service and Solicitor surnames before sending packages to CCU.

(2) Keep surnames by subordinate staff to a minimum.

(3) If a Deputy Assistant Director has surname authority, the Assistant Director does not need to surname the document too unless policy within the Program or Regional offices dictate otherwise.

(4) Officials surnaming documents must write their name legibly and include an abbreviation for their offices and date of the surname on the yellow copy.

(5) Officials may surname documents electronically using DTS. Contact CCU for more information on this process.

(6) We may use a simultaneous surnaming process when necessary. To do this you:

(a) Create multiple surname packages and send them to surnaming officials at the same time.

(b) Request that the surnaming offices send the packages back to you after surname, and

(c) Compile the surnames and send one package to CCU.

2.15 How do employees determine who must surname correspondence and official documents?

A. Correspondence and Official Documents the Director Signs: Originating divisions must obtain the necessary surnames for correspondence and other official documentation. Depending on the geographical proximity to their Assistant Director and the nature of the document, Divisions may obtain surnames from other divisions and Assistant Directors before sending the package to their Assistant Director. Divisions should use the following guidelines:

(1) Other Division Chiefs surname correspondence for matters directly within their areas of responsibility. When appropriate, surnaming Division Chiefs may also ask their Assistant Directors to surname a document.

(2) The Assistant Director – International Affairs surnames correspondence for international issues (including migratory bird, fishery, endangered species, marine mammals, and ecosystem management issues having international effects) and foreign travel.

(3) The Chief, Division of Contracting and Facilities Management surnames correspondence related to contracts, cooperative agreements, and space.

(4) The Chief, Division of Human Capital surnames correspondence for personnel and ethics matters.

(5) The Chief, Division of Public Affairs surnames:

(a) Correspondence involving national conferences, press-related issues, ceremonies, and public outreach projects; and

(b) Briefing statements prepared for the Assistant Secretary and above, including for Secretarial and Presidential trips.

(6) The Chief, Division of Congressional and Legislative Affairs surnames correspondence:

(a) Addressed to the Chairs of the Service's legislative (not appropriations) committees/subcommittees,

(b) Addressed to members of Congress (except constituent letters),

(c) That discusses legislative issues (except appropriations-related issues), and

(d) That the Executive Secretariat controls.

(7) The Chief, Division of Budget (DB) surnames written communications implying a current or future commitment of money, appropriations, budgets, and full-time equivalent resources. This includes, but is not limited to:

(a) Formal recommendations for land acquisition, facility construction, major organizational changes, reprogramming funds, or requesting supplemental; and

(b) Communications with the Chairs of our appropriations committees/subcommittees.

(8) The Chief, Division of Policy and Directives Management surnames correspondence related to:

(a) Directives,

(b) Regulations,

(c) Federal Register Notices,

(d) Audits

(e) The Paperwork Reduction Act, and

(f) Competitive sourcing.

(9) The Assistant Director – External Affairs surnames correspondence to State fish and wildlife agency directors and national conservation organizations.

(10) The Solicitor's Office surnames documents that:

(a) Discuss significant legal or litigation-related issues,

(b) Reference Solicitor's or Regional Solicitor's opinions, or

(c) Otherwise discuss legal advice.

(11) For more information about the surname process for rule making, see 202 FW 4, and for information about the surname process for Directives, see 011 FW 3.

B. Correspondence and Official Documents Officials Above the Director Sign. In addition to the signature process we describe in section 2.15A, you must consider the following:

(1) The Director, Deputy Director, or his/her designee surnames correspondence prepared for the signature of the Assistant Secretary and above.

(2) Correspondence we prepare for the Secretary or Deputy Secretary to sign:

(a) Requires the Assistant Secretary – FWP's surname, and

(b) Usually requires the surnames of:

(i) The Solicitor,

(ii) The Department's Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, and

(iii) The Assistant Secretary – Policy, Management, and Budget.

(3) Contact CCU if you have questions about which Departmental surnames you need.

(4) The Executive Secretariat determines what surnames are required for the correspondence it controls. CCU obtains the necessary Departmental surnames for this correspondence.

2.16 How does CCU return a surname package for changes or corrections?

A. CCU may make editorial corrections and revisions that the Director, Deputy Director, or Department requests if the document is uploaded in MS WORD in DTS. Otherwise, CCU returns the package to the originating office for corrections.

B. Within 1 working day the originating office must send revised documents back to CCU using DTS.

C. Originating offices should contact CCU, and not the Director's office, about the status of correspondence.

2.17 What happens to the correspondence and official documents after the Director signs them?

A. For correspondence the Director signs that is addressed to the Directorate or a certain member(s) of the Directorate, CCU:

(1) Distributes the correspondence electronically through DTS, and

(2) Sends the original, signed version back to the responsible program office for filing.

B. For correspondence the Director signs that is addressed to someone outside of the Service, CCU:

(1) Uploads a copy of the signed correspondence into DTS, and

(2) Sends the original, signed document back to the originating office for distribution.

C. Originating offices must:

(1) Ensure that signed correspondence is sent to the intended recipient.

(2) Keep a copy of all outgoing, signed correspondence in its official files. See 282 FW 5 for information about compiling a decision file and an administrative record. See 283 FW 1 and 2 for information about retaining and disposing of records.

D. CCU hand carries documents to the Assistant Secretary's office if the Assistant Secretary, Deputy Secretary, or Secretary must sign them.

2.18 How does the Service handle Congressional requests for documents and records? See 282 FW 3 for information about Congressional requests and other global requests for documents and records.

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*For information on the content of this chapter, contact the Correspondence Control Unit. For information about this Web site, contact **Krista Holloway** in the Division of Policy and Directives Management.*

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