

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Leaving a Lasting Legacy

*Permits as a Conservation Tool*





# Introduction

During the past one hundred years, the United States has enacted wildlife laws and ratified international treaties to protect our heritage of wild animals, plants, and their habitats. Most of these laws use permits as a tool to assist in the conservation of protected resources.

Human demands on animals and plants can leave them vulnerable. Permits provide a means to balance use and conservation by tracking and regulating human activities that affect wildlife.

The history of the United States is full of stories that illustrate the effects of overuse. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, bison herds had all but disappeared as railroads pushed west. On the east coast, women's fashion dictated the need for large numbers of bird feathers, a trend that might have led to the obliteration of egrets and other birds.

Conversely, many species became sustainably maintained through varying regulatory programs. Birds once hunted for their beautiful feathers found protection with passage and international

endorsement of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The recovery of the American alligator and many furbearing species, such as bobcat and river otter, are excellent examples of the success of an international permitting program.

Times change, and the demands placed on wildlife also change. From time to time, Service permit programs review their activities to determine how well they serve the public. During the past several years, the programs have once again initiated such a review process, with the help of scientific and conservation organizations, which have requested better approaches to programmatic permitting. In late 1998, the Service asked the public to comment on the need for a policy using permits as a conservation tool and to offer suggestions for improving the permitting process. These valuable comments served as a springboard for the development of a vision document and action plan. Recognizing that administration of permit programs must remain flexible, the Service's vision is to use permits to foster partnerships and enhance our ability to protect and conserve wildlife.

*The mission of the permit programs is to promote long-term conservation of animals, plants, and their habitats, and encourage joint stewardship with others.*

**Front Cover:**  
*White-faced ibis*  
USFWS

**Inside Cover:**  
*Polar bear on ice*  
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# Conservation Laws

*“The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value.”*

Theodore Roosevelt

The Nation’s wildlife laws embody a collective commitment to conserve wildlife. They maintain biodiversity of animals and plants for enjoyment of people today and all future generations. Each law has its own unique purpose and uses permits in specific ways to protect species.

**Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act** (1940) protects eagles from commercial exploitation and safeguards their continued survival in the United States. Permits are issued for scientific, educational, and religious purposes, depredation, and falconry (golden eagles).

**Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)** (1975) monitors and regulates global trade in many species of animals and plants through a system of import and export permits to ensure that commercial demand does not threaten their survival in the wild.

**Endangered Species Act** (1973) protects endangered and threatened animals and plants and their habitats. Permits are issued for scientific research and enhancement activities, incidental take, and conservation activities on private lands. Permits are also issued for zoological, horticultural, or botanical exhibition purposes for threatened species. Import/export licenses and designated port exception permits are issued for international shipments of all wildlife.

**Lacey Act** (1900) prohibits accidental or intentional introduction to the United States of exotic injurious or potentially injurious wildlife, and provides for the humane transport of wildlife. Permits for injurious wildlife are issued for import, transport, and acquisition for zoological, educational, medical, or scientific purposes.

**Marine Mammal Protection Act** (1972) protects marine mammal populations and their ecosystems. Permits are issued for scientific research, public display, enhancing the survival or recovery of a species or stock, educational or commercial photography, and import of personal sport-hunted trophies of polar bears taken in Canada.

**Migratory Bird Treaty Act** (1918) conserves migratory birds. Permits are issued for scientific collecting, banding and marking, falconry, raptor propagation, depredation, import, export, taxidermy, waterfowl sale and disposal, and special purposes.

**Wild Bird Conservation Act** (1992) ensures that populations of exotic birds are not harmed by trade to the United States and encourages wild bird conservation programs in countries of origin. Permits are issued for scientific research, zoological breeding or display, cooperative breeding, and personal pet purposes.

# Permit Programs

The following programs work together to conserve wildlife in accordance with laws, while streamlining the permitting process to help the public.

The *Endangered Species* program helps protect and recover our country's threatened or endangered species and their ecosystems by listing, reclassifying and delisting native species; consulting with Federal agencies on activities that may affect listed species; planning and implementing recovery activities; issuing permits to allow take and interstate commerce for recovery purposes, incidental take, and conservation activities on private lands; and funding State endangered species conservation efforts.

The *International Affairs* program (*Division of Management Authority* and *Division of Scientific Authority*) provides leadership for the United States to help ensure that any international trade in protected wildlife is sustainable. The Management Authority processes permits under CITES, Lacey Act (injurious wildlife), Marine Mammal Protection Act, and Wild Bird Conservation Act. The Division also processes certain permits under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (cross-border transport), Migratory Bird Treaty Act (import and export only), and U.S. Endangered Species Act (import and export of native and

non-native species, and interstate and foreign commerce of non-native species). The Scientific Authority provides scientific review of certain permit applications; lists, reclassifies, and delists foreign threatened and endangered species; and works with other countries to protect and recover protected wildlife.

The *Division of Law Enforcement* contributes to every aspect of wildlife conservation by targeting potentially devastating threats, such as illegal trade and commercialization, habitat destruction, and environmental contaminants. Law Enforcement investigates and solves wildlife crimes, inspects wildlife shipments, and helps Americans obey wildlife laws. The Division issues import and export licenses, non-designated port permits, and certain CITES permits.

The *Division of Migratory Bird Management* leads the Service effort to protect and enhance bird populations throughout the Western Hemisphere. The Division collects and analyzes information about migratory birds and their habitats so that wildlife managers can work effectively to conserve them and so that Americans can continue to enjoy them through hunting, birdwatching, and other activities. The Division issues permits under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

*Our vision is to use permits to foster partnerships and enhance our ability to protect and conserve wildlife.*



*Lange's metalmark butterfly*  
Jerry Powell



# Conserving Wildlife, Plants, and their Habitats

Permits help conserve wildlife, plants, and their habitats, although most people are unaware of the role. Permits can tell us something useful about the resources they regulate. In general, wildlife conservation laws and treaties prohibit certain activities with protected species, such as take from the wild. Exceptions are usually allowed for limited purposes. To make these exceptions, the Service issues permits that allow us to monitor activities to determine how they affect protected wildlife populations. Data on these species can be accumulated to support sustainable management of wildlife.

Permits enable scientists to conduct research on protected species to develop information needed to assist with their conservation. For example, little was known about where spectacled eiders spent much of the year until scientists obtained permits that allowed them to implant transmitters on this threatened species. Using radio satellite telemetry, researchers discovered large flocks of eiders in remote openings in the Bering Sea

ice packs during winter months. Learning where spectacled eiders spend the winter enabled researchers to develop specific research projects to identify biological or environmental factors hindering the recovery of this species.

The Service uses a computer database (Service Permit Issuance and Tracking System) to look at the total number of animals and plants taken from a population, and monitor permit activities affecting wildlife and plants. Analyzing the permit information allows us to detect biological concerns. Review of information in the database can reveal if too many permitted animals are being taken to sustain the population. Alternatively, a large number of permits requested for a particular species could signal an overabundance of a species or increased impacts to a species. For example, an overabundance of a migratory bird species may lead us to increase the number of permits issued to manage that species to alleviate property damage.

*“A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”*

Aldo Leopold

# Conserving Wildlife, Plants, and their Habitats

*“Man does not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it.”*

Chief Seattle

## **Our Vision:**

We will develop permit programs that encourage broad participation in the stewardship of the Earth’s natural resources.

We will consider the risks and benefits of proposed activities to species, and use the best available science and expertise to make our decisions.

We will use permits to authorize and monitor activities consistent with the conservation, protection, and enhancement of wildlife, plants, and their habitats.

We will use and share the unique and valuable information collected through our permit programs to assist the Service and its partners in conserving, managing, and protecting species and their habitats.

## **Our Action:**

Focus permit programs on risk management and conservation:

*Objective 1: Identify at-risk species and activities to assist in conservation efforts*

*Objective 2: Focus resources based on risk assessment*

## **Service Permit Issuance and Tracking System (SPITS):**

We will use the database, SPITS, to assist us in focusing permits on risk management. SPITS is used to:

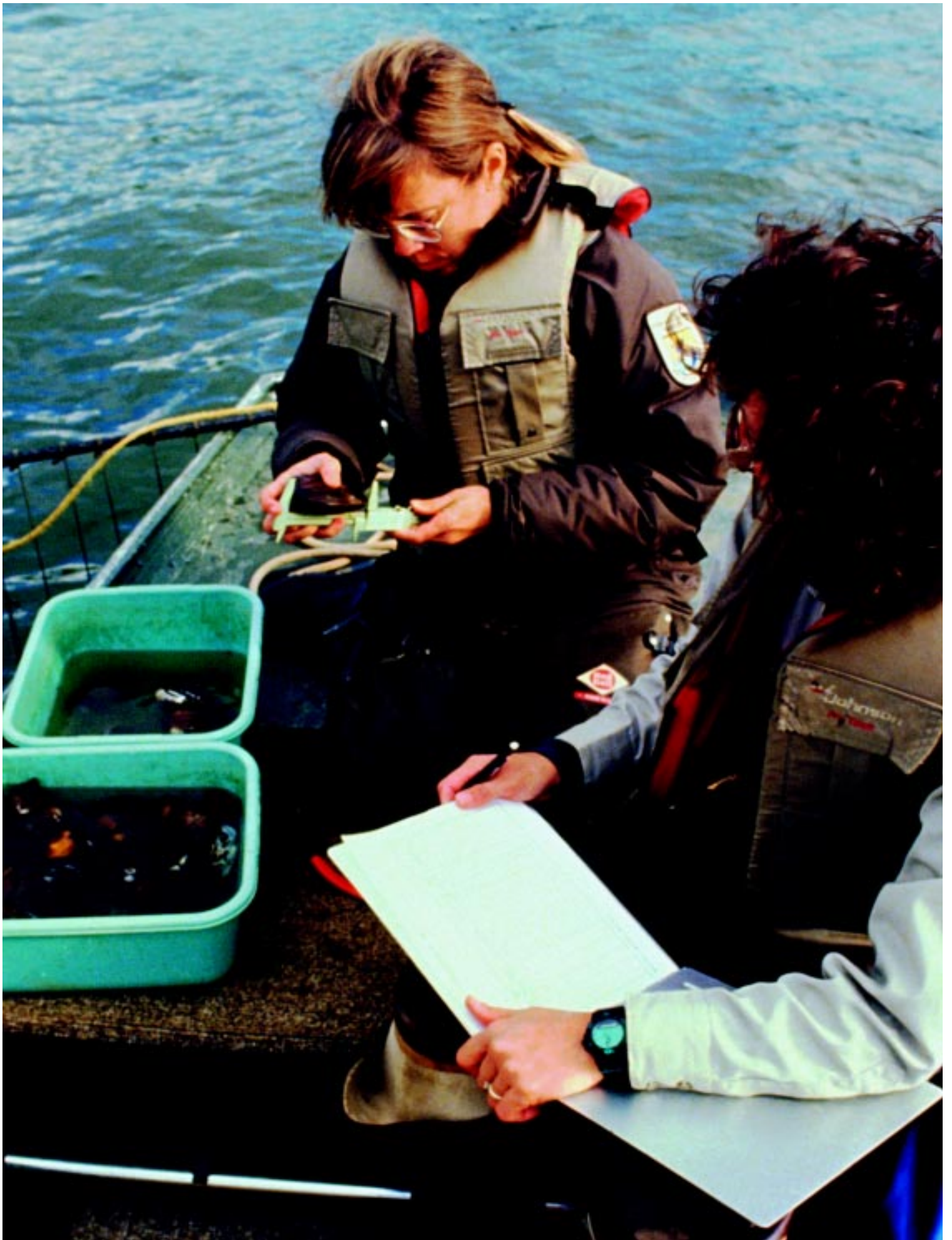
- issue and track permit actions and species data;
- promote timely permit issuance;
- share species and management data;
- increase coordination across programs, reduce paperwork, and improve consistency; and
- conduct searches and generate reports.



**Above:**  
*Eastern box turtle*  
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**Opposite:**  
*Service staff measuring mussels*  
Hollingsworth/USFWS







# Serving and Working with People

Laws and regulations help ensure that wild plants and animals have a future in their natural environment. However, it is the commitment of individuals working in partnership with each other that brings about on-the-ground results. We are committed to developing partnerships that recognize the important role everyone plays in conserving our precious resources. The opportunities to benefit wild plants and animals are as numerous as the partners who work with us.

Permit staff work closely with their state government counterparts, who are integral to the successful conservation of our Nation's wildlife. They cooperate on certain permitting activities, such as falconry, and consult on requirements for regulated activities and management of protected wildlife.

Activities conducted under an enhancement of survival permit associated with a "Safe Harbor" agreement benefit both the species and the private landowner. John Elick is one of eight Texas ranchers working to restore more than 17,800 acres as part of the Coastal Prairie Conservation Initiative. The initiative is jointly sponsored by the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge, the Sam Houston Resource Conservation and Development Board, and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts. It allows landowners to receive cost-share incentives for voluntary prairie habitat conservation practices such as brush control, modifications in grazing management, and prescribed burning. The permit relieves landowners of future regulatory restrictions in return for voluntary actions that contribute to species conservation.

"Basically," said Elick, "I learned that the Safe Harbor was designed to protect the ranch owner's property rights on his land, and yet provide the government special use ranch land for endangered species habitat without the price tag of acquiring the land. Both the government and private landowners benefit without any negative drawbacks."

The Service also works with partners abroad to help conserve some of the world's most vulnerable wildlife resources. Sometimes those efforts can be as simple as sending wildlife back where it belongs, as shown by the recent saga of a little CITES-protected chameleon. Illegally imported into the United States through O'Hare Airport in Chicago, Illinois, "Louie" made his way back to Israel, thanks to dedicated CITES officials and the quick issuance of a permit. Louie was released by Israeli Nature Reserve officials near where he was originally taken to assist in the conservation of this species in the wild. Without the permit and coordination with the CITES Management Authority of Israel, the chameleon never would have returned home.

Communication is key to successful partnerships. We strive to increase the satisfaction of our partners by providing friendly, efficient service and recognizing the contributions they make in the conservation and management of protected species. A lasting legacy of wild animals and plants for future generations is only possible through the mutual stewardship that results when partners work together.

*"Treat people . . . as partners; treat them with dignity; treat them with respect."*

Thomas Peters  
and Robert  
Waterman, Jr.



# Serving and Working with People

## **Our Vision:**

We will encourage partnerships to promote joint stewardship of wildlife, plants, and their habitats.

We will listen and respond to the public, our partners, and others.

We will expand our use of technology to improve customer service and access to information.

We will provide the public with timely decisions in a clear and consistent manner.

## **Our Action:**

Implement the permitting process fairly and consistently

*Objective 3: Provide permit staff the tools needed to process permit applications consistently*

*Objective 4: Provide clear policies and regulations*

Treat conservationists as partners

*Objective 5: Recognize permittees as partners in conservation*

*Objective 6: Recognize the value of research and utilize the expertise of partners*

*“To work for the common good is the greatest creed.”*

Albert Schweitzer



## **Above:**

*Sturgeon*  
USFWS

## **Left:**

*Fairy slippers*  
Peter Carboni/USFWS



# Commitment to Excellence

In 1998, the public told the Service they wanted a more efficient, customer friendly permitting process. Making these improvements is a primary focal point for the permit programs.

For years, The Peregrine Fund submitted a new permit application each time they wanted to import or export a harpy eagle. Improving communication between the Service and the Fund resulted in a better understanding by the Service of the project and a better understanding by the Fund of the permitting process. Working with the Fund, the Service approved a new project-based permit, which allows multiple imports of birds for rehabilitation, captive breeding, and scientific research. The Fund's ability to conserve the endangered harpy eagle was enhanced considerably.

Responsiveness to the Fund's concerns is only one example of the Service's continuing commitment to make the permitting process a vehicle that promotes conservation while meeting the needs of our customers and helping the public understand the process. We are working to create consistent Service-wide permit programs, provide clear policy direction, and use new technology to streamline the process.

To realize this vision, the permit programs need dedicated leaders and committed staff to resolve complicated issues in ways that benefit wildlife and people. Visions become realities when they are endowed with sufficient resources. To achieve our far-reaching goals, an action plan and the people and funds to carry it out are all critical.

*“...the effort...  
to streamline  
the permit  
process  
associated with  
The Peregrine  
Fund's  
international  
efforts to  
conserve the  
endangered  
Harpy Eagle  
has resulted in  
a tremendous  
improvement  
in our ability to  
conserve the  
species...”*

The Peregrine Fund

# Commitment to Excellence

*“Communication is the most important skill in life.”*

Stephen R. Covey

## **Our Vision**

We will recognize the importance of customer service and are committed to providing clear, consistent, and helpful information.

We will coordinate across permit programs and develop clear policy.

We will base permit decisions on sound science and relevant laws.

We will process permits fairly and consistently in a timely manner.

We will use communications and data technology to streamline the permitting processing.

We will seek to attract the best qualified individuals to lead and support the permit programs.

We will allocate sufficient resources to achieve our vision.

## **Our Action:**

Make the permitting process efficient and customer friendly

*Objective 7: Process applications within specific time frames*

*Objective 8: Use current technology to streamline the permitting process*

*Objective 9: Simplify the permitting process*

*Objective 10: Provide assistance on how to apply for a permit*

*Objective 11: Consolidate permits*

*Objective 12: Coordinate permit requirements at different levels of government*

*Objective 13: Simplify port clearance*

**Provide permit programs with sufficient support**

*Objective 14: Increase staff to meet critical needs*

*Objective 15: Educate internal and external audiences on the value, issues, and needs of permit offices*



*Lemur*  
© Maggie Tieger



# APPENDIX

## *Permits Action Plan*

### **Action: Focus permit programs on risk management and conservation**

*Objective 1: Identify at-risk species and activities to assist in conservation efforts*

- Identify species and activities by level of risk and develop consistent policy, guidelines, and procedures for processing permit applications based on risk
- Develop SPITS tracking and reporting capability to facilitate the analysis of cumulative take of wildlife and plants for species management

*Objective 2: Focus resources based on risk assessment*

- Focus resources based on risk analysis and monitor effectiveness of the programs to ensure species conservation
- Consider including general terms and conditions that, based upon levels of risk, provide for appropriate flexibility and allow for specific unforeseen circumstances
- Explore ways to streamline application review procedures for low-risk species

### **Action: Implement the permitting process fairly and consistently**

*Objective 3: Provide permit staff the tools needed to process permit applications consistently*

- Develop a user and training manual for permit issuance
- Develop a SPITS user and training handbook to ensure consistent data entry
- Use SPITS to generate permits that have standard conditions and reporting requirements
- Conduct a Service cross-program permit workshop annually
- Provide on-going training within programs on regulations and policies

*Objective 4: Provide clear policies and regulations*

- Conduct an assessment of which permit regulations and policies need to be revised or developed and establish a 5-year schedule
- Coordinate across programs on the development and review of permit regulations

### **Action: Treat conservationists as partners**

*Objective 5: Recognize permittees as partners in conservation*

- Develop a policy that recognizes the role our partners play in wildlife and plant research, management, and conservation
- Increase communication and outreach with the regulated community about the role of permits in conservation

*Objective 6: Recognize the value of research and utilize the expertise of partners*

- Evaluate ways to identify in regulations or policy that basic research can be beneficial for some species

### **Action: Make the permitting process efficient and customer friendly**

*Objective 7: Process applications within specific time frames*

- Establish internal deadlines for processing applications based on risk
- Establish procedures for tracking permit applications

*Objective 8: Use current technology to streamline the permitting process*

- Create a Service permit web page to provide a guide to the permit processing offices, copies of regulations and policies, and link to a combined species query
- Develop a system that allows for the electronic access, submission, and tracking of permit applications

*“Future generations will know that with a relatively small amount of effort we could have saved virtually all of the biota.”*

Edward O. Wilson

“Be gentle with  
the earth.”

Dalai Lama

- Develop a system that allows for electronic submission or scanning of annual reports

*Objective 9: Simplify the permitting process*

- Extend duration of permits where appropriate
- Make reporting requirements and frequency of reporting appropriate for the type of permit; investigate standardizing forms for collecting annual report data

*Objective 10: Provide assistance on how to apply for a permit*

- Revise application forms to ask for information in clear, easy-to-understand language and test their effectiveness
- Develop decision trees to aid the public and Service employees in deciding when a person needs a permit and which application form to submit
- List telephone numbers in national and regional FWS directories by subject and permit program
- Revise and develop clear fact sheets
- Use the SPITS-generated letter to inform the applicant that the application was received, who the contact person is, and what the expected processing time is, as appropriate

*Objective 11: Consolidate permits*

- Review current permit types and develop standardized application forms so one permit can be issued for multiple authorizations
- Develop standardized consolidated terms and conditions
- Consolidate annual report requirements; evaluate the appropriate frequency of report submission or if information could be collected in some other way

*Objective 12: Coordinate permit requirements at different levels of government*

- Provide on the Service web page contact information for natural resources agencies of States and foreign countries or provide a link to their web pages

*Objective 13: Simplify port clearance*

- Allow electronic filing of the Wildlife Declaration form

**Action: Provide permit programs with sufficient support**

*Objective 14: Increase staff to meet critical needs*

- Establish a National Permit Coordinator and Washington Office permit coordinator for each program
- Hire a web master/outreach/SPITS specialist
- Evaluate Regional permit workloads and add more staff as needed
- Establish consistent, program-wide position descriptions
- Include permit programs in the budget and Government Performance and Results Act processes

*Objective 15: Educate internal and external audiences on the value, issues, and needs of permit offices*

- Use this vision document, fact sheets, and other mechanisms as outreach tools
- Develop an outreach plan



*Tennessee purple coneflower*  
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*The mission of the U.S. Fish and  
Wildlife Service is working with  
others to conserve, protect and  
enhance fish, wildlife, plants and  
their habitats for the continuing  
benefit of the American people.*

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