

**GAO Entrance Conference with the Departments of Commerce and of the Interior
Potential Move of NMFS into FWS (Job Code 361381)
February 14, 2012 @ 1:30 p.m. EST**

Purpose of Meeting

- Introduce GAO staff and provide overview of the engagement
- Obtain preliminary information and points of contact for follow-up

Job Objectives

The Senate Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security has asked GAO to review the feasibility of moving the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) into the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The preliminary research objectives are: (1) How would federal fisheries and protected species management potentially be affected by moving NMFS into FWS? (2) What factors should be considered if Congress were to move NMFS into FWS and what management practices could facilitate such a move?

Estimated Timeframes

We have just initiated the review, but our tentative timeframes are as follows:

- Complete our scoping and design phase (expected May 2012)
- Report issuance date (TBD)

Preliminary Discussion Questions

1. What are the potential benefits of moving NMFS into FWS?
2. What are the potential drawbacks of moving NMFS into FWS?
3. Do you believe other organizational structures, such as keeping the current structure or moving NOAA as a whole into Interior, would better help the agencies to meet their missions?
4. Please describe the major functions and responsibilities of FWS. [We have reviewed the FWS website and are familiar with the various programs the agency administers, but would like to understand the agency's perspective on its main functions.]
5. Please describe the major functions and responsibilities of NMFS. [We have reviewed the NMFS website and are familiar with the various programs the agency administers, but would like to understand the agency's perspective on its main functions.]
6. Please discuss programmatic areas where both FWS and NMFS (or other NOAA agencies) are involved.
7. For areas involving both FWS (or other Interior agencies) and NMFS (or other NOAA agencies):
 - a. Are there any areas where you feel FWS and NMFS are collaborating well?
 - b. Are there any areas where you feel that FWS and NMFS could improve coordination or collaboration?

8. We are aware that there have been numerous previous proposals to move or otherwise restructure Commerce, Interior, and their component agencies. Does Commerce or Interior have any analysis or summary of these previous proposals, or other documents that would describe potential benefits or concerns about such proposals?
9. Do you have recommendations for non-federal entities (e.g., states, NGOs, or other interest groups) who would have an opinion on a potential merger that you think we should contact?

Next Steps

Going forward, who should GAO contact to set up meetings or plan site visits (audit liaison or agency contact)?

During the scoping phase, we will likely visit regional and field offices to better understand Interior and NOAA programs.

GAO Contacts

- Steve Secrist, Assistant Director, Natural Resources and Environment Team, San Francisco CA, 415-904-2236, secrists@gao.gov
- Jonathan Dent, Analyst-in-Charge, Natural Resources and Environment Team, Seattle WA, 206-287-4879, dentj@gao.gov
- Eric Bachhuber, Senior Analyst, Natural Resources and Environment Team, Seattle WA, 206-287-4781, bachhubere@gao.gov