



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT RATING TOOL

REVIEW OF U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM PROGRAM



The Nulhegan River (photo courtesy of Silvio O. Conte Refuge)



United States Department of the Interior


Office of Inspector General

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Memorandum

To: Director, Fish and Wildlife Service

From: Donald W. Cairns 
Director, Program Analysis and Technical Support

Subject: Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) - Review of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System Program (Report No. Y-RR-FWS-0003-2006)

This final report presents the results of our review of the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge System Program. It includes eight suggestions for improving the Program prior to the next scheduled Office of Management and Budget PART review.

The legislation, as amended, creating the Office of Inspector General requires that we report to the Congress semiannually on all reports issued. Accordingly, we will include information from this report in our next semiannual report.

We want to thank you and your staff for your valuable input during our review. Although a response to this report is not required, we would appreciate your informing us of any progress you make prior to the PART reassessment.

If you have any comments or questions regarding this report, please call me at 703-487-8011.

WHAT IS THE PART?

Federal agencies use the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), a standard questionnaire, to submit information on federal programs to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

OMB uses the information to evaluate program effectiveness, to recommend improvements for rated programs, and to follow up on those improvements.

PART results are published on the ExpectMore.gov Web site.

See Appendix A for more information on the history and use of the PART.

WHY WE DID THIS REVIEW

The Deputy Secretary asked the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to review the programs assessed using the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) and suggest improvements for programs that could not demonstrate results. From 2002 to 2006, the OMB assessed 73 DOI programs, reflecting over \$9 billion dollars in annual budget authority. During this review, we evaluated the Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) program, which previously failed to demonstrate results, and is scheduled to be reassessed by OMB in FY2007.

SUMMARY

Overall, FWS has made significant progress in addressing the four OMB recommendations related to the NWRS program. Specifically, FWS has developed a 5-year draft strategic plan (2006-2010); developed and implemented an automated system that allows aggregation of performance data at national and regional levels; engaged an independent contractor to evaluate program effectiveness in addressing strategic goals; and has made considerable progress in linking individual employee performance plans to appropriate targets. However, we have identified areas still in need of improvement.

Thus, this report provides suggestions for further improvement and is structured to correspond to key recommendations from OMB's 2003 program assessment. If FWS satisfactorily addresses the areas of improvement we have identified, we believe the NWRS Program will be better positioned to achieve a positive rating in its upcoming PART reassessment.

BACKGROUND

FWS oversees over 545 national wildlife refuges and 37 wetland management districts that cover more than 95 million acres. The primary mission of the NWRS program is to conserve the Nation's wildlife habitat. FWS allows conservation-compatible use of refuges including hunting, fishing, and education.

NWRS is valued at about \$17 billion, and current annual program funding is almost \$400 million. The program is supported by more than 3,000 refuge employees and about 40,000 volunteers.

Because OMB was unable to determine NWRS performance in 2003, it assigned the FWS NWRS an overall rating of "Results Not Demonstrat-

ed.” Specifically, OMB felt that FWS had a vision for this program but that the NWRS lacks clear priorities, measurable outcome-based performance goals, and independent program performance evaluations.

OBJECTIVES

Our review objectives were twofold. We sought to review FWS progress in responding to OMB FY2003 PART recommendations as well as provide suggestions that FWS can use to prepare for its upcoming PART review.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We limited our review to OMB’s four follow-up recommendations listed in its Improvement Plan, taking into consideration OMB PART guidance (See Appendix). To evaluate FWS progress, we interviewed key officials involved in strategic planning and regional performance measurement; reviewed and analyzed supporting documents; and visited the Patuxent Research, Eastern Neck National Wildlife, and Silvio O. Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuges as well as the Northeast Regional Office. At the refuge sites, we obtained and evaluated employee performance plans. We also obtained several Senior Executive Service (SES) performance plans for review from FWS headquarters.

We conducted the review in accordance with the January 2005 “Quality Standards for Inspections” established by the President’s Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

RESULTS OF REVIEW

We reviewed the NWRS program and found that FWS has made significant progress on all four OMB improvement plan recommendations. We address each recommendation below and provide suggestions that FWS might take to improve its PART rating.

OMB RECOMMENDATION 1: DEVELOP A 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM PROGRAM.

OMB’s recommendation to develop a separate 5-year strategic plan for the NWRS program was intended to correct identified strategic planning deficiencies. OMB noted that in April 2003, FWS developed long-term and annual performance goals for the program as part of a DOI directive to construct an FWS operational plan to support the department-wide strategic plan. However, these measures were largely output or activity oriented. Contrastingly, the PART encourages the use of outcome or results oriented measures.

In response to this recommendation, FWS developed a draft NWRS strategic plan dated March 2006. The draft includes 12 long-term strategic goals, with narratives that broadly explain expected outcomes in terms of a general performance statement. We found, however, that the draft strategic plan lacks quantitative outcome measures with baselines for each goal.

At the time of our review, FWS was considering five proposed outcome measures (with related targets and baseline data) for inclusion in the final version of the strategic plan. We believe that FWS has not clearly demonstrated how the five new measures will connect to the 12 strategic goals.

EACH LONG TERM STRATEGIC GOAL DOES NOT HAVE SPECIFIC OUTCOME MEASURES OR TARGETS

PART QUESTION 2.1
Does the program have a limited number of specific long-term performance measures that focus on outcomes and meaningfully reflect the purpose of the program?

PART QUESTION 2.2
Does the program have ambitious targets and time frames for its long-term measures?

The NWRS draft strategic plan (FY2006–2010) has long-term strategic goals, but fails to provide a limited number of specific long-term performance measures that focus on outcomes. The plan contains an appendix that provides over 100 annual performance measures and targets for the 12 strategic goals. It is unclear how these measures can be used to assess the long-term progress in a particular area. For example, in the area of refuge habitat there are 2 strategic goals supported by 40 performance measures and targets. The draft strategic plan however, has failed to develop an overall outcome measure in this area.

The following diagram illustrates how one of the FWS proposed outcome measures can be used to address multiple goals. The proposed outcome measure for refuge lands and waters with habitat in good condition is *percent of acres*. The baseline provided for this measure is 88.5 percent. The annual targets (in terms of additional percent of acres in good condition) had not been determined at the time of our review.

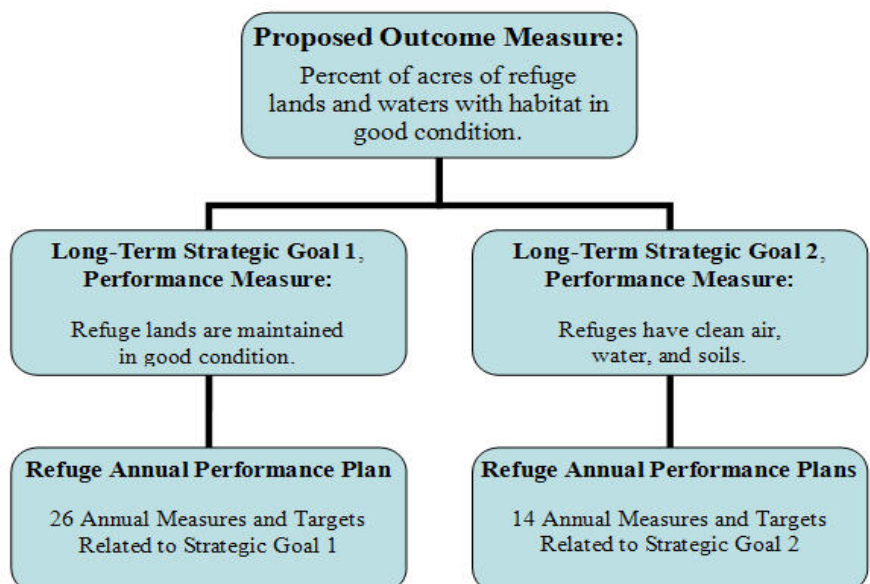


Figure 1. Possible use of outcome measures.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIC GOALS DO NOT HAVE A LIMITED NUMBER OF SPECIFIC ANNUAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES

FWS should structure goals to directly match specific annual performance measures. These measures should be outcome-oriented.

We suggest that the FWS director have the NWRs program chief:

- Ensure that each long-term strategic goal has specific outcome measures and related targets.
- Match long-term strategic goals with a limited number of specific annual performance measures.

OMB RECOMMENDATION 2: DEVELOP BASELINE DATA AND TARGETS FOR PERFORMANCE MEASURES.

PART QUESTION 2.4
Does the program have baselines and ambitious targets and time frames for its annual measures?

Prior to the OMB review in FY2003, regional managers did not formally set goal-based targets to measure their actual progress against baseline data. However, since the 2003 review FWS has significantly changed its strategic and annual planning processes. In response to OMB's second recommendation, FWS designed and implemented a database to capture information on 545 refuge units and 37 wetland units. The Refuge Annual Performance Plan (RAPP) system is a fully automated, in-house system that links to other programs such as the Department maintenance database. The RAPP system addresses Departmental, FWS operational plan, and PART goals. The first year data collected using RAPP established the baseline.

AUTOMATED REFUGE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PLANNING AND REPORTING REINFORCES ACCOUNTABILITY

The RAPP system allows field offices to compile performance data and submit it to the regional office supervisor via an electronic workbook. Once approved, the performance data is sent electronically to the regional chief. Managers at each level have the option of accepting or rejecting the information submitted by lower levels. Regional information feeds into the national numbers at headquarters. This review and approval process spreads accountability throughout all levels in the organization. FWS completed its RAPP annual cycle at the end of FY2006 using FY2005 actual data as its baseline.

Both headquarters and field officials acknowledge problems related to timeliness when using the RAPP system. First, the RAPP process takes longer than it should due to insufficiencies in computer access and support. In order to close accounting books by the beginning of each August, refuge officials use RAPP estimates instead of actual figures for the last month of each fiscal year.

ONE TARGET-RELATED BEST PRACTICE IDENTIFIED

During our visit to a refuge region, we identified a best practice that could benefit all regions. Northeast Regional Office managers consider the staff hours expended in the current year when they formulate the next year's performance targets. The region uses information obtained from the Activity Based Costing (ABC) system to determine how many hours were

spent on individual performance measures. This best practice enables managers to use this information, along with actual performance data for the year, and gauge what can be accomplished the following year and set new targets for annual measures accordingly.

Tracking approximately 100 annual measures and developing related targets, while maintaining high quality supporting data is a challenge for refuge field offices. Unfortunately, because the RAPP and ABC Systems were developed separately, ABC codes do not align with RAPP system performance measures. Although regional office managers cross reference ABC codes to RAPP measures and provide field managers with that information, field office supervisors still have to estimate how many hours are actually worked under each measure. At this point, there is no way to tell if refuge field offices are recording hours consistently.

We suggest that the FWS director have the NWRS program chief:

- Consider using actual data for the last month of the previous fiscal year rather than estimates for the last month of the current year when reporting actual performance over a 12-month period.
- Compare refuge regional approaches for developing targets to identify and implement best practices and
- Establish activity codes that can clearly show the relationship between RAPP and ABC.

OMB RECOMMENDATION 3: DEVELOP A PROCESS FOR AND SCHEDULE OF INDEPENDENT PROGRAM EVALUATIONS.

FWS has selected a contractor to facilitate an independent evaluation of the NWRS Program. The contract award was approximately \$400,000. The statement of work calls for an independent evaluation that will be completed by April 2007 and provide recommendations on how to improve operations to better achieve mission effectiveness. However, at this point, FWS has only one independent evaluation scheduled and no plans for regularly scheduled evaluations, as envisioned by OMB.

ONE INDEPENDENT PROGRAM EVALUATION IS SCHEDULED

In September 2006, the contractor held a 2-day workshop to develop the evaluation design and process. The OMB examiner and members of the FWS leadership team, including representatives from headquarters and regional offices, participated. The contractor has three people on the core evaluation team, including two evaluation specialists and an ecologist.

The contractor's "Evaluation and Methodology Work Plan Discussion Draft," dated October 13, 2006, calls for taking a comprehensive look at NWRS program effectiveness in addressing the 12 long-term goals in the strategic plan. In the draft, the contractor provides an analytical framework for the evaluation demonstrated in a tiered approach. The top tier provides two high-level NWRS program objectives linked to the middle tier of seven intermediate objectives and outcomes. The bottom tier

PART QUESTION 2.6
Are independent and quality evaluations of sufficient scope and quality conducted on a regular basis or as needed to support program improvements and evaluate effectiveness and relevance to the problem, interest, or need?

addresses cross-cutting support activities. We believe that this hierarchical framework of objectives could be used by FWS to develop fewer, consolidated, long-term strategic goals, with intermediate, measurable outcomes or objectives.

We suggest that the FWS director have the NWRS program chief:

- Schedule a series of focused independent program evaluations over an extended time frame. Use the independent evaluation's framework of objectives to structure the final strategic plan.

OMB RECOMMENDATION 4: LINK INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE PLANS WITH GOAL-RELATED PERFORMANCE TARGETS FOR EACH FISCAL YEAR.

PART QUESTION 2.8
Has the program taken meaningful steps to correct its strategic planning deficiencies?

FWS made progress in linking individual employee plans to strategic and operational plan goals, however, some employee plans still lack goal-related performance measures that are tied to annual targets.

Our sample included a total of 50 individual employee performance plans that encompassed both supervisory and nonsupervisory operational positions. At the refuge offices visited, we reviewed employee performance plans for field and regional officials; at headquarters, we reviewed SES performance plans.

SOME EMPLOYEE PLANS LACK GOAL-RELATED PERFORMANCE MEASURES TIED TO ANNUAL TARGETS

Initially, FWS senior officials told us that all SES performance plans were linked to an automated database and that almost all FY2006 employee plans were linked to appropriate goal-based measures. Later, officials explained that FWS required only SES performance plans to be tied to a numeric target. The five SES plans we reviewed were linked to one or more critical measures with numeric targets and to the operational plan or strategic goals.



*Black Branch tributary of the Nulhegan River
(photo courtesy of Silvio O. Conte Refuge)*

Within our sample, we found that all plans included at least one critical element tied to strategic or operational plan goals. The DOI Management Initiative Tracking System shows that 82 percent of FWS employee plans in FY2005 include performance measures. In over one-third of the employee plans, however, FWS did not link performance measures or targets directly to the goals cited in the critical elements.

According to an FWS senior official, the next step is to address the GS-14 and GS-15 level manager and supervisor plans.

OMB "Guidance to Improve the Consistency of 2006 PART Assessment," section 3.2, states

PART QUESTIONS 3.2
Are Federal managers and
program partners (grantees,
subgrantees, contractors,
cost-sharing, etc.) held
accountable for cost, schedule
and performance results?

that program managers and partners are accountable for achieving program results. It requires that all programs establish clearly defined or quantifiable performance standards for and accountability of managers.

We suggest that the FWS director have the NWRS program chief:

- Link all program manager and supervisory employee performance plans to goal-related performance targets for the next fiscal year.

APPENDIX: HISTORY AND USE OF THE PART

PERFORMANCE MONITORING IS REQUIRED BY LAW

In 1993, the Congress found federal managers to be “disadvantaged in their efforts to improve program efficiency and effectiveness, because of insufficient articulation of program goals and inadequate information on program performance.” The Government Performance and Results Act (Public Law 103-62), or GPRA, was passed to promote a focus on results by requiring federal agencies to engage in strategic planning and performance reporting.

The “President’s Management Agenda,” which includes a Government-wide initiative to improve budget and performance integration, was published in 2001. The Agenda calls for agencies to monitor program performance and to incorporate performance review into budgetary decision-making.

OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS ARE ASSESSED DURING BUDGET FORMULATION

To support this initiative, OMB instituted use of a standard questionnaire called the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART). Using the PART requires federal managers to review program design, strategic planning, management, and results. Based on the questionnaires, OMB rates “Performing” programs as “Effective,” “Moderately Effective,” “Adequate,” or “Ineffective.” “Not Performing” programs have ratings of “Ineffective” and “Results Not Demonstrated.”

OMB HAS FOUND THAT MANY DOI PROGRAMS LACK PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

As of 2006, of the federal programs assessed, only 17 percent have been rated Effective, while 21 percent were placed in the category Results Not Demonstrated. Within the DOI, OMB assessed 73 programs, reflecting over \$9 billion dollars in annual budget authority. Of these, only eight were rated Effective and OMB examiners were unable to determine whether 22 of these programs, reflecting nearly half of the assessed spending, were performing satisfactorily due to the lack of reliable performance information.

SUMMARY OF PART RATING RESULTS

PART Ratings	Federal Programs	DOI Programs
Effective	166 (17%)	8 (11%)
Moderately Effective	299 (31%)	21 (29%)
Adequate	276 (28%)	22 (30%)
Ineffective	27 (3%)	0 (0%)
Results Not Demonstrated	209 (21%)	22 (30%)
Total Number of Programs Rated	977	73

OMB publishes PART results on its ExpectMore.gov Web site, together with recommended improvement actions, for every program it has assessed. Agency officials and program managers follow up on these

recommendations and keep OMB, and ultimately the public, apprised of progress in establishing or improving mechanisms for performance measurement. They communicate updates both internally and at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/expectmore/>. OMB then reassesses programs on schedules developed in consultation with the responsible agencies.

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