



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

# RECOVERY OVERSIGHT ADVISORY

*A Critical Point Evaluation Product*



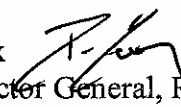


## RECOVERY OVERSIGHT OFFICE

Washington, DC 20240

SEP 25 2009

To: Jackie Parrish  
Assistant Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

From: Robert A. Knox   
Assistant Inspector General, Recovery Oversight Office

Subject: Recovery Oversight Advisory – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region Four  
Planning and Early Implementation Efforts (ROO-ROA-FWS-5002-2009)

Congress provided us with funding to oversee and ensure accountability of the \$3 billion appropriated to the Department of the Interior (Department) in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act). To help safeguard these taxpayer dollars, we are focused on preventing fraud, waste, and mismanagement; early detection to reduce the impact of misuse when it does occur; and ensuring transparency in our oversight efforts. In a spirit of collaboration with the Department as it implements the massive programs envisioned under the Act, this memorandum highlights our observations on planning and early implementation efforts in Region 4 (Southeast Region) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

Our observations are based on a site visit to the Region 4 office in Atlanta, interviews with staff, and review of documentation. The Act requires that the majority of funding appropriated to the Department, including that appropriated to FWS, be obligated by September 30, 2010. Overall, we found that the Region seems to be well prepared for Recovery Act implementation and has taken steps to ensure it can obligate funding to pay for and make significant progress to complete its Recovery Act projects by the obligation deadline. We shared one concern with the Region on potential delays in implementation due to the upcoming hurricane season. In the past, hurricanes have caused enough damage to require immediate and sustained attention of program and acquisition staff. Such damaging events, if they were to occur this season, could impact the implementation of Recovery Act projects. The bureau will need to have adequate contingency plans to address such a potential event.

We do not require an official response to this advisory, but we will post it on our website ([www.doi.ig.gov](http://www.doi.ig.gov)) and [Recovery.gov](http://Recovery.gov). Information contained in this advisory may also be included in our semi-annual reports to Congress. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

## Planning and Early Implementation Efforts

On February 20, 2009, the Department issued the “Economic Recovery Template and Guidance for Project Lists.” This document included general guidance and an Excel spreadsheet template in which to list projects and several corresponding data elements—outlined in the guidance—for each project.<sup>1</sup> Bureaus were then directed to develop a list of projects, and associated data, that they planned to pay for with Recovery funds. Bureaus were also instructed to develop implementation plans outlining Bureau processes and procedures for monitoring projects, mitigating risks, and reporting. The development of these project lists and plans has been a significant part of initial project planning throughout the Department, and they provide a potential tool for accountability and transparency in Recovery Act implementation.

With input from the Regions, FWS submitted one bureau-wide project list and one bureau-wide implementation plan to the Department, and set expectations for the development of implementation plans at the regional level. At the time of our visit, FWS Region 4 was waiting for finalized Recovery Act Implementation guidance from Service headquarters. Therefore, it had not yet fully completed regional plans for implementing its Recovery Act projects. However, working from draft FWS Implementation guidance issued April 29, 2009, the Region had taken several preliminary steps in its implementation efforts.

The Region submitted and received Departmental approval on its initial list of proposed Recovery Act projects, and it had integrated those projects into the regional Master Acquisition Plan, which included assigning accounting codes and project managers for each project. Regional staff had also submitted project substitutions for some projects on the initial Recovery Act project list. The projects that were removed were already accomplished using other funding, the funding could not be obligated by September 2010, or significant progress could not be made on the project to ensure timely completion. Additionally, the Region assembled a Recovery Action Team. The team meets regularly, and they were in the process of writing delegations of authority and hiring additional personnel to help with Recovery Act efforts, including a program analyst responsible for Recovery Act implementation and reporting, procurement personnel, construction representatives, architects, civil engineers, and administrative help.

As of June 8, 2009, the only Recovery Act money awarded in the Southeast Region was for 37 Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) hires and 50 Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) participants. The team expressed confidence, however, in its ability to obligate its remaining Recovery Act funds quickly and to manage projects efficiently by using the same organizational structure, and many of the same processes and procedures, set in place during the Hurricane Recovery effort. This Hurricane Recovery effort, by estimates of Regional staff, had tripled their workload. We commended these efforts in our September 2008 audit report *DOI’s Hurricane Rebuilding Efforts*,<sup>2</sup> noting that FWS had successfully spent 90 percent (\$145 million) of its supplemental funding by the end of fiscal year 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> Data elements include, among others, fiscal year in which deferred maintenance or line item construction projects are planned for funding in the bureau five year plans; state; project elements (including health and safety, energy, efficiency/green buildings, use of renewable energy sources, youth/community service, national icons, and treasured landscapes); proposed procurement instrument; NEPA compliance completed, permitting and consultation completed.

<sup>2</sup> C-IN-MOA-0006-2007.

## **Hurricane Season Poses a Potential Barrier to Timely and Effective Implementation**

With hurricane season well under way, the Regional team did express concern over the ability to balance the requirements of managing Recovery Act projects with those of hurricane recovery efforts should a large hurricane hit the Region. Since our visit, the FWS finalized its Recovery Act Implementation guidance and submitted it to the Department. In the finalized guidance, the Service notes that in the event of a hurricane, “resources will be moved from other regions to support the impacted region(s).” We share the concern over the ability of Region 4 to balance hurricane relief and Recovery Act efforts simultaneously. In the response to our draft report, FWS informed us that Region 4 had developed planning scenarios for responses to hurricanes, and that the Region scheduled their Recovery Act projects accordingly to ensure adequate management support. We are pleased with this approach and encourage the Region to take advantage of calmer weather and continue moving expeditiously in implementing Recovery Act projects in accordance with the obligation deadline of September 30, 2010.

cc: Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Economic Recovery and Stimulus  
Assistant Secretary – Policy, Management and Budget  
Director, Office of Acquisition and Property Management  
Director, Office of Financial Management  
Recovery Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Audit Liaison, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Departmental GAO/OIG Audit Liaison  
Audit Liaison, Office of the Secretary

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