



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:
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Memorandum

JUN 28 2001

To: Regional Directors, Regions 1 - 7
Attention: ARDs -- Fisheries
ARDs -- Ecological Services
Acting Manager, California Nevada Operations Office

From: **Acting Deputy** Director

Subject: The Habitat Information Tracking System for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Coastal Program is Operational.

The new accomplishments tracking system, developed by the Fisheries and Habitat Conservation Program, for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Coastal Program is now operational.

The new tracking system, referred to as the Habitat Information Tracking System or "HabITS," replaces the International Tracking System as the official accomplishment reporting system for the Partners Program and the Coastal Program. It was developed in response to changes in the programs over time, the need to more precisely track habitat restoration accomplishments (in particular net-gain in wetland acres), and reporting requirements for the Government Performance and Results Act. The new accomplishment reporting system will make it possible for program administrators to more consistently and accurately track accomplishments. HabITS is part of the overall ECOS Program, which has been reviewed and is in compliance with all SITA technical requirements and data standards.

The goals in developing HabITS were to provide an updated information management system that is user-friendly, Internet accessible, geo-referenced, available to the Field Offices for data entry and retrieval, and useful as an analytical and predictive tool by the Field, Regional, and Washington Offices. Relevant data from the ITS will be incorporated into the new accomplishments reporting system to maintain long-term data integrity. Development efforts have been coordinated with the Division of Bird Habitat Conservation and the Division of Refuges to minimize data duplication and develop data sharing processes to ensure that all program information needs are met.

As a component of the Service's Environmental Conservation Online System, field biologists, Regional and Washington Office staff, and managers will be able to view information contained in HabITS in context with other important Service and other agency data - on a geographic basis through ECOS' mapping capabilities - and will be able to access valuable information contained in other modules in ECOS to aid in planning and evaluating on-the-ground activities.

In preparation for the release of HabITS, the Washington Office held a series of training sessions in December 2000 and January 2001, in each of the Regions. Partners Program and Coastal Program staff from many Field Offices, as well as each Regional Office, participated in the workshops. In addition, a number of the Regional and State Program Coordinators provided additional training sessions for field staff unable to attend the scheduled training sessions. This training was considered to be critical since the Regions and Field have the primary responsibility for entering the Partners Program and Coastal Program data into HabITS. These training workshops also provided an opportunity for Regional and Field input on various aspects of the system.

HabITS is now operational and all States and Regions can and should be entering data. We would like to thank the Regions and Field staff for their assistance and comments at each step in the process. We will continue to depend on the comments of the users to identify ways to improve HabITS.

The Division is continuing to work with the system developers to incorporate changes recommended by program staff, and to incorporate other improvements to make HabITS more efficient and effective. Program staff using HabITS are encouraged to submit comments and recommendations for improvements to HabITS at any time. HabITS is envisioned as a "living" system, and we are committed to ensuring that it meets the needs of its users at all levels by incorporating improvements as appropriate. Modifications to increase the speed and ease of data entry should be completed by September 2001. We anticipate full use of HabITS in FY 2002 for accomplishments reporting.

With your assistance, we are confident that HabITS will provide a comprehensive picture of the accomplishments of these Programs, and will improve the Service's ability to effectively communicate the importance of these Programs to others in the Service, Congress, potential and existing partners, and others.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Hannibal Bolton, Chief, Division of Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance and Habitat Restoration, at (703) 358-1718 or Sally Valdes-Cogliano, Branch of Habitat Restoration, at (703) 358-2201.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam D. Hunt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.