



MEMORANDUM



April 1, 2024

To: State Fish and Wildlife Agency Directors, Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Governor of Guam, Governor of U.S. Virgin Islands, Governor of American Samoa, Governor of Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Mayor of the District of Columbia.

As a condition for receiving funding through the State Wildlife Grant Program, Congress required that all States, Territories, Commonwealths, and the District of Columbia (agencies) develop a State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). Agencies must review these plans and, if they deem necessary, update them at least once every ten years. The agencies will provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Region with the most current version of their SWAP. The deadline for most agencies to complete their next revision is October 2025.

This memorandum has multiple purposes. It provides interim guidance for agencies to meet established requirements when revising and submitting a digital form of a SWAP to the USFWS. It guides the Regional Review Teams, consisting of state directors and USFWS regional leaders, in their review and approval of revised SWAPs. It is also intended as guidance for USFWS Office of Conservation Investment staff, so that agencies' digitally formatted SWAPs and related innovations are universally encouraged and accepted across the eight USFWS Regions.

This interim guidance provides a flexible framework for agencies that will support their efforts to make their SWAPs "user-friendly," meaning more accessible, shareable, interactive, and easier to update and use. This memo and associated guidance document do not replace the current [Guidance for Wildlife Action Plan Review and Revision](#) (2017 Guidance). Rather, it will be attached to the 2017 Guidance on an interim basis and may be incorporated into it permanently after October 2025. Submission of a hard copy or PDF-only SWAP will continue to be acceptable under existing 2017 Guidance.

SWAPs were a monumental achievement when first developed in 2005, and their continual improvement and technological advancement will help ensure they remain important resources for the greater conservation community. As blueprints for fish and wildlife conservation, accessibility and ease of use of SWAPs by diverse partners is important to maintain their relevance and ensure their successful implementation.

Sincerely,

Gary Frazer, Acting Director of the
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles F. Sykes".

Charles F. Sykes, President of the
Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Digital SWAP Interim Guidance

Historically, most State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) have been published as hard copy or Portable Document Format (PDF) documents, limiting their accessibility to agency staff, partners, and the public. Technological advances have provided new avenues for sharing information contained within SWAPs to make them more accessible, shareable, interactive, and easier to update. This document establishes guidance for fish and wildlife agencies choosing to use a digital format for their SWAP that includes more technologically advanced elements beyond a PDF document. However, adoption of SWAP digital formats described in this guidance is voluntary, and there is no requirement for agencies to change the format in which they have previously submitted their SWAP.

This guidance primarily applies to states developing and submitting a Digital SWAP; however, use of the interim guidance and SWAP Summary Template is not restricted. Any agency may elect to follow this interim guidance and use the SWAP Summary Template, currently in development, as an organizational tool when conducting a Comprehensive Review of their SWAP.

State and Service personnel, including Regional Review Team members and designees, are encouraged to work closely together to ensure efficient and consistent approval of SWAP Comprehensive Reviews across the Service Regions. This will require the same frequent communication and flexibility characteristic of the previous rounds of SWAP Comprehensive Reviews.

A **Digital SWAP** is defined as a SWAP that is created, stored, and/or published in one or more of the following electronic formats, either in addition to or in lieu of a PDF-based SWAP. Note that the following forms of SWAP are generalized, and an agency may choose to use features of more than one format.

Web-hosted SWAP-A SWAP that exists on a server and is made available online as a series of web pages or a combination of web pages and one or more PDFs. Web-hosted SWAPs may include links to mapping applications that provide spatial information for SWAP elements. Example: [Oregon Conservation Strategy](#).

SWAP Database-A SWAP that exists as a database (e.g. MS Access, SQL database, spatial database, etc.) that either serves as a standalone SWAP or that supplies Eight Required Element content to a Web-hosted SWAP or a SWAP Dashboard.

SWAP Dashboard-A SWAP that exists as a digital dashboard (e.g., beta [Regional SWAP Dashboard](#)) that synthesizes Eight Required Element data, allowing a user to access desired information through an interactive user interface. A SWAP Dashboard may also be used to aggregate information from multiple SWAPs and track SWAP implementation. Example: [Colorado Wildlife Action Plan](#).

Submission of a Digital SWAP must not place greater burden on the Regional Review Teams (RRTs) that review and approve SWAPs, nor on USFWS staff who review and approve State Wildlife Grant proposals. The RRTs and USFWS staff must have on file the core Eight Required Element information and a roadmap that includes or describes the location of each of these Elements. To ensure RRTs and USFWS grant approvers are accessing and reviewing the current Element information, Digital SWAPs should be considered static until a revision is initiated by an agency and approved by USFWS following the requirements described in the 2017 Guidance.

Office of Conservation Investment Guidance:

1. The 2017 Guidance remains applicable to Comprehensive Reviews and Major and Minor Revisions, regardless of the format of the submitted SWAP. This means the following:

- a. After submission of a revised SWAP to USFWS but prior to final USFWS approval, an agency may only modify the SWAP as agreed to in the RRT's official written recommendations; and
- b. A SWAP that is approved by USFWS must generally remain static until a subsequent revision is approved by USFWS, except for clarifying edits and grammatical or typographical fixes, as specified in the 2017 Guidance.

2. While agencies are encouraged to publish approved SWAPs in advanced digital formats as described in this guidance, the format selected to create, store, or publish a SWAP is at the discretion of each fish and wildlife agency.

3. Core SWAP content, meaning the minimum information required to meet the Eight Required Elements, must be submitted to USFWS in a format that is easily downloaded and stored as one or more static files. This excludes other, non-required information such as spatial data, images, or relational information typically stored in a SWAP Database or made available via a SWAP Dashboard or Web-hosted SWAP. Although core content may be submitted in any common and easily accessible format, use of the SWAP Summary Template that is under development, is recommended for organizing this information in a consistent fashion. The Summary Template will only include information essential for review of the Eight Required Elements by the RRT.

4. Regardless of the format(s) of a submitted Digital SWAP, each agency should strive to make key information in SWAPs accessible to all interested members of the public, including those without access to a computer or the Internet. This could include factsheets, web pages, reports, audio files or other means that would increase the accessibility of information in a SWAP.

Agencies should work with their regional USFWS representative or RRT member if there are questions related to this guidance. Staff contacts are available from the USFWS. Early and frequent communication with USFWS staff can help ensure a smooth and timely review and approval of the SWAPs.