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**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** July 9, 2004

**TO:** Forest Supervisors and District Rangers, USFS
District Managers and Field Managers, BLM
Project Leaders, USFWS
State Habitat Directors, NOAA Fisheries
Level 1 and Level 2 Team Members

**FROM:** Jack Troyer, Regional Forester, USFS
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**SUBJECT:** Endangered Species Act Section 7 Streamlining Workshops in Boise, Idaho and Portland, Oregon: Summary of Field Comments and Possible Action Items (ICS Memo #3)

We wanted to express our appreciation for your support and participation in the section 7 streamlining workshops held in Boise, Idaho and Portland, Oregon in February and March 2004. Our overall impression along with the feedback from participants indicates the workshops were a success. Approximately 200 staff participated in each workshop with strong representation from interagency line officers, program managers, and level 1 and level 2 staff. Many of us were available throughout the workshops and we were pleased to see so many of you engaged in raising questions and seeking a deeper understanding of how to implement section 7 procedures to more effectively achieve our shared mission.

As you might remember, each workshop contained breakout sessions that were designed to better understand local issues, concerns, and training needs. Facilitators captured your feedback on flip charts, summarized that information, and made presentations to the broader group of workshop participants. The Interagency Coordinators Subgroup (ICS) consolidated and summarized the flip chart information from both workshops and identified your cross-cutting issues, concerns, and training opportunities. In general, we heard requests for: (1) expanded use

of programmatic consultations; (2) increased emphasis on co-locating our field offices; (3) various requests for training; and (4) functional and procedural improvements to the streamlining process. We also could see that there was not enough time allocated to answer all of your questions on how the new counterpart regulations are intended to complement the existing streamlining procedures and interface with National Fire Plan project design criteria. Below is a further description of these items.

1. Expanded Use of Programmatic Consultations

Several breakout groups requested expanding the use of programmatic section 7 consultation approaches. Some groups indicated that a more consistent interagency approach to programmatic consultations could result in increased predictability in species conservation and reduced project-level workloads. One team, however, highlighted the need for more careful monitoring and tracking of programmatic approaches. The Regional Executives agree with this request and have already assigned the task to the ICS. The ICS is conducting an assessment of programmatic consultations to determine whether existing programmatics should be expanded or new ones created. The ICS will be providing us with a report at our July 9, 2004 meeting.

2. Increased Emphasis on Co-locating Field Offices

Several breakout groups highlighted the interagency benefits of co-locating interagency field offices. The Regional Executives understand and appreciate the efficiencies created by office co-locations such as those already in place in Boise, La Grande, Wenatchee, Roseberg, Portland and others. Field comments indicated that existing co-locations should be expanded to include the full complement of agencies as opportunities arise. The ICS has brought this request to the Regional Executives' attention. To address this request, we will look for opportunities for increased use of office co-locations as leases expire and agencies plan to relocate.

3. Requests for Training

Most breakout groups indicated that five years between streamlining workshops was too long and recommended that more targeted local-level training approaches be developed. Several breakout groups asked that a streamlining training module be created for new staff. Other staff asked for regular refresher training sessions for experienced staff.

We also understand that interest may be growing for a training session that would focus on facilitation and mediation for some level 1 team members. In response to your requests, we asked the ICS and Regional Technical Team to evaluate the various training proposals and to develop an interagency recommendation for our consideration. We encourage you to contact your ICS member with any specific training needs because interagency Regional Executives will be meeting again in early fall where we intend to make commitments to future training.

4. Streamlining Improvements - Functional and Procedural

Many breakout groups identified the need for additional streamlining improvements. In general, field comments could be categorized as either functional or procedural improvements to the

streamlining process. For example, some field staff noted that team functions could be improved if level 2 team members had a better understanding of the process, met with their interagency counterparts on a regular basis, and were more engaged in the day-to-day status of consultation actions. Regarding procedural improvements, some breakout groups asked for example biological assessments (BAs) to help demonstrate appropriate levels of documentation and what constitutes BA completeness. Field staff also raised the issue of consistency in effects determinations and asked for regional assistance. The Regional Executives also asked the ICS to evaluate your observations and recommendations for further improvements to the streamlining process. We expect this topic (along with training) to be discussed with recommendations and decisions at our next Regional Executives' meeting.

5. Counterpart Regulations, Streamlining, and National Fire Plan Design Criteria

Field staff who attended the Boise and Portland Streamlining Summits raised more questions than time allowed for answers about how the new counterpart regulations would interface with streamlining (level 1 teams) and National Fire Plan project design criteria. In short, we expect the next 6-12 months to be a transition period as the action agencies begin conducting their own informal consultations on National Fire Plan actions. As stated at the Boise and Portland workshops, the Regional Executives view the counterpart regulations as another tool in the consultation streamlining toolbox, along with National Fire Plan project design criteria and level 1 teams. The relationship between the new counterpart regulations and existing regional processes and procedures is probably best defined in the interagency web-based training module for the new regulations.

The training module states that:

> " The counterpart regulations are intended to complement the various consultation tools and processes developed to facilitate section 7 consultation, such as streamlining procedures, programmatic consultations, development and use of design criteria, biological assessment templates, use of level 1 teams, Net Benefits Guidance, and use of consultation and monitoring agreements. Since these existing tools provide substantive information for planning, evaluating, mitigating, and documenting projects, and their effects on listed species, and support informed decision-making by the action agencies their continued and complementary use would be encouraged, as appropriate, with the counterpart regulations and ACA. "

If you encounter questions during field implementation of the counterpart regulations, we encourage level 2 teams to play an active role, and raise broader technical, policy or implementation issues to the ICS, as necessary.

Again, we appreciate your participation along with all the various resource specialists representing our agencies in helping to make these summits a success. Please pass along our thanks to the many people that contributed to the effort by taking part and sharing their insights. We viewed these workshops as an important training opportunity for new staff, and as a key opportunity to renew our commitment to our shared mission of conserving Endangered Species Act-listed species in the process of managing Federal lands. If you have any questions or comments on the workshop summary described above, please contact your agency ICS lead.

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