

National Biological Survey: A Progress Report

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Only a few months ago, the National Biological Survey (NBS) was only a concept and a commitment by Secretary Babbitt soon after his arrival as Interior Secretary. Much has happened in those few months and this new bureau is now a formal part of the Administration's FY 1994 budget proposal. It is scheduled to be a functioning new bureau by October 1.

I think of this proposal as entering its third phase. Phase one was a bold new concept, clearly and forcefully presented by the Secretary. He explained the need for a non-advocacy scientific biological sciences bureau and his vision for creating it. He reasoned that it could provide more and better data, understand the functioning of ecosystems, and enable managers to recognize ecosystems in trouble before the eleventh hour crises (ecological train wrecks)

caused by the listing of endangered species and the attendant protective mechanisms required by the Endangered Species Act.

The second phase was the development of the FY 1994 budget by determining which parts of the nine existing Interior bureaus should be moved to the new bureau. This included FY 1993 base funding and new FY 1994 funds already proposed by each bureau. A task force of people drawn from several bureaus was given the responsibility. Basically, the research, inventory and monitoring, and information transfer capabilities within existing bureaus were closely examined for transfer, since these are to be the main responsibilities of the new National Biological Survey.

The evolution of this concept involved the development of a Science Council and a Policy Board. The Science Council will be made up of representatives from other Federal agencies, state agencies, professional societies and non governmental non-profit and research organizations. It will assist in

improving coordination with entities outside of Interior and will offer suggestions about science trends and needs for the NBS.

The Policy Board will consist of senior representatives from all Interior bureaus. It will offer guidance to identify priorities for the NBS, so that it can produce data useful to resource managers.

We have now entered the third phase. This involves interaction with the existing bureaus as organizational units, not just task force members. It also involves interacting with Congress to approve the budget and with authorizing legislation which will be needed for a few specific items now in the Fish and Wildlife Service.

It also will involve development of specific mechanisms by which the objectives will be accomplished. These details will be necessary in order for people to understand organizational, supervisory, budgeting, and other aspects of how the work will get done. It will provide specifics to further develop the NBS from a concept to a functioning bureau by October 1, 1993.