

The National Biological Survey: Opening Day

By Dr. F. Eugene Hester

In the last issue [see Summer 1993] I explained the concept behind the creation of the National Biological Survey (NBS), a non-advocacy biological research and inventory agency in the U.S. Department of the Interior. Oct. 1, 1993 is the date scheduled for NBS's opening day. The NBS Implementation Task Force continues to work energetically to ensure the transition is smooth.

Earlier this month, Assistant Interior Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks George Frampton asked me to continue on with NBS after October 1 as Deputy Director. It is an honor I gladly accept.

NBS becoming a bureau on October 1, however, depends on several steps involving the Congress and the Secretary of the Interior.

To date, three NBS authorizing bills have been introduced—two in the Senate and one in the House. None of the bills was voted on by Congress before its summer recess; however, Congressional leaders have been supportive of the NBS, as reflected in the House vote action and Senate Committee mark up of the FY94 NBS budget.

Since budget authority is expected—even if a Continuing Resolution should be operative on October 1—Secretary Babbitt will be able to establish the NBS through a Secretari-

al Order. While the Secretary is cooperating fully with Congress, authorizing legislation is not required for the new bureau to open its doors.

So what will be the picture on October 1, when NBS formally begins operation? For scientists in universities, research centers, and in the field, the picture will look very familiar. In fact, for most of FY94, the picture may be nearly indistinguishable from the current one. While more than 1,700 employees will be transferred administratively from other Interior bureaus to the NBS, not one person has been identified who will have to undergo a geographical move that would involve a change of residence. Nearly all available positions within the new bureau are expected to be filled through the lateral transfer of employees within programs being moved. We are expecting that it will be a number of months before the Eco-regional Offices are established as well.

It is a rare occurrence in the career of a federal employee to have the opportunity to participate in the creation of a new agency. This is an exciting time for everyone involved in this process, and a promising time for improving our understanding of ecosystems through research, inventory and monitoring, and information transfer.

For some further thoughts on NBS, see page 31.