



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

MAY 13 2020

Mr. Kelly Hepler
President
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
1100 NE First Street
Washington, DC 20002

Dear President Hepler:

This letter is in response to your letters of April 10 and April 27, 2020 requesting flexibilities in response to COVID-19. The concerns and issues raised in your letters demonstrate the severity of the impact this pandemic is having on the financial and operational capabilities of many state agencies. My office has carefully evaluated the concerns raised and has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to provide this response.

The temporary financial relief requested in your April 10, 2020, letter with respect to match requirements, periods of availability, reversion requirements, law enforcement funding eligibility, and administrative needs all require statutory changes in order to be put into effect. The Department of the Interior (DOI) and FWS understand state desires to pursue the requested changes given the severity of the ongoing and anticipated impacts of the pandemic. While we do not have the authority to unilaterally make these changes, we will respond to any request to provide technical assistance if requested by Congress on legislation to address these needs. We would rapidly respond with any process, policy, or regulatory changes necessary to immediately implement any statutory changes.

The concerns you have expressed with respect to the transition to GrantSolutions are also understandable for the many reasons you laid out in your letters. As often is the case with large system deployments, GrantSolutions is being deployed in stages with FWS scheduled to go live in the system on May 18, 2020. We have carefully considered your request for a delay in the FWS's transition until October 1, 2020, but a delay in the FWS deployment will necessitate a delay in all subsequent deployments, adding substantial cost and potentially pushing the final deployments into late 2021. While we cannot accommodate your delay request, we are confident that we can adequately address your primary concern to avoid potential lapses in grant funding. To eliminate the potential for lapses in grant funding, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) will ensure that any state unable to successfully access and use GrantSolutions to submit its award will be provided the necessary support to ensure grant funding continues to be available at the start of the state fiscal year.

Finally, concerning your requests for audit suspensions as needed, our review found there are currently nine ongoing WSFR Program audits of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies. We have

asked WSFR to coordinate with the affected states and determine on a case-by-case basis if the state needs an initial suspension of up to three months. If so, WSFR will work with the auditors to coordinate the suspension with an option to extend it by three months if warranted. WSFR will also coordinate any suspensions with the Office of the Inspector General and ensure the seamless resumption of the work at the appropriate time. If there are other DOI audits impacting your operational capacity at this time, please reach out to the FWS Regional Director in your region for assistance.

The DOI, FWS, and WSFR will continue to use the authorities and flexibilities we have at our disposal to accommodate the needs of our State partners during this extremely difficult period. If you have any questions, please reach out to Paul Rauch at (202) 208-5078.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott J. Cameron". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "S".

Scott J. Cameron

Acting Assistant Secretary

for Policy, Management and Budget