

From: [Sherri Fields](#)
To: [Mike Murray](#)
Cc: [Darrell Echols](#); [Joe DeVivo](#); mike.stevens@sol.doi.gov; [Sandra Hamilton](#); [Thayer Broili](#); [Timothy Pinion](#)
Subject: Re: Idea of Doing Peer Review of USGS Protocols
Date: 06/24/2009 03:31 PM

Hi Mike,

I will contact USGS's regional office management on how best to proceed. I would imagine that the project managers/authors of the protocols will continue to maintain that they completed an adequate peer review. I will get back to you after I talk with USGS. (fyi- the NPS review was never part of USGS's peer review.)

Sherri

Sherri L. Fields
Chief, Science & Natural Resources Division
Southeast Regional Office
National Park Service
(404) 507 - 5807

▼ [Mike Murray/CAHA/NPS](#)

**Mike
Murray/CAHA/NPS**

06/24/2009 02:02 PM

To: Sherri Fields/Atlanta/NPS@NPS
cc: Sandra Hamilton/DENVER/NPS@NPS, Timothy Pinion/Atlanta/NPS@NPS, Joe DeVivo/Atlanta/NPS@NPS, mike.stevens@sol.doi.gov, Darrell Echols/CAHA/NPS@NPS, Thayer Broili/CAHA/NPS@NPS

Subject: Idea of Doing Peer Review of USGS Protocols

INTERNAL DELIBERATIVE COMMUNICATION

Sherri,

Our proposed resource protection measures for the draft ORV management plan/EIS are generally consistent with the USGS protocols. I can just about guarantee that the reliance on the USGS protocols as the basis for the resource protection measures in the plan will be viewed as a weak link and a target of ORV stakeholders during the NEPA process and in whatever litigation occurs thereafter. Concerns about the credibility of the protocols have been frequently expressed by ORV stakeholders and public commenters throughout the RegNeg process and the protocols continue to be mentioned as a focal point of attack by ORV stakeholders in electronic media (e.g., commentary and blogs on the Island Free Press; Dr. Mike Berry, etc.). Not sure if you were aware, but early in the RegNeg process Sandy Hamilton arranged for a peer review of the Vogelsong study due to so

many stakeholder concerns about it. As it turned out, that peer review revealed significant concerns about relying upon Vogelsong as a basis for estimating the potential economic impacts regarding ORV use. In other words, an objective peer review more or less shot down some of the conclusions of that study. Given the outcome of that after-the-fact peer review, which no doubt will embolden stakeholders to attack other such "guidance" and information, there is no doubt that the USGS protocols are, at best, a question mark and, at worst, a sitting duck for continued attacks about their scientific credibility.

When I compare the USGS protocols to the nonbreeding shorebird monitoring protocol recently developed for CAHA by the SECN staff (Bryne etc.), I have to say that the SECN protocol "looks and sounds" very professional and credible, but the USGS protocols simply do not. The lack of a true formal peer review of the USGS protocols (they were reviewed by NPS staff and a few other people perceived as having a stake in the issue such as David Rabon and Walker Golder) raises major concerns, especially since the USGS policy in recent years has been to conduct a true peer review of all USGS "information products" before issuing them as official documents that USGS can stand behind. The informal format of our USGS protocols (e.g., no report # and no formal sign-off by a USGS official) gives them a less-than-official appearance. Although I think the content of the USGS protocols is generally biologically credible, given the sole focus of resource protection without regard to other park management objective, it is difficult to defend them as "good science" from constant attacks. In any case, anticipating that the USGS protocols, as they currently exist, will be a major point of attack as the planning process moves forward, I'd like to be proactive and have an objective review conducted of the USGS protocols (better to do it now before we fully commit to relying on them in the DEIS, rather than find out the flaws later in a lawsuit) to confirm their scientific credibility.

I think the most efficient way to approach this would be to ask USGS (or someone) to conduct a formal peer review process, belated as it is, of the existing USGS protocols, particularly the recommended buffer distances, rather than start over and develop new protocols that would presumably be peer reviewed. The park has a modest amount of funding available this FY (from lapses, etc.), which I could direct toward getting this done. (I assume \$ would facilitate getting it done in a timely manner.)

Would it make sense to re-contact USGS and ask them to conduct a formal peer review of the respective protocols as written, following their current peer review policy (attached) which requires peer review of all USGS "information products"? Is that something SER could coordinate (i.e., serve as the POC with USGS), or should the park pursue it directly? (I think having USGS coordinate a peer review would be better than having the NPS (e.g., SECN) do it.)

What do you think? Do you have any other ideas about how to proactively and objectively check and confirm the credibility

of the USGS protocols?

[attachment "502_3 - Fundamental Science Practices Peer Review.mht"
deleted by Sherri Fields/Atlanta/NPS]

Any advice would be appreciated!

Mike Murray
Superintendent
Cape Hatteras NS/ Wright Brothers NMem/ Ft. Raleigh NHS
(w) 252-473-2111, ext. 148
(c) 252-216-5520
fax 252-473-2595

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