

§ 453.02 Definitions.

Definitions applicable to this part are contained in 50 CFR 450.01.

§ 453.03 Committee review and final determinations.

(a) *Final determinations.* Within 30 days of receiving the Secretary's report and record, the Committee shall grant an exemption from the requirements of section 7(a)(2) of the Act for an agency action if, by a vote in which at least five of its members concur:

(1) It determines that based on the report to the Secretary, the record of the hearing held under § 452.05, and on such other testimony or evidence as it may receive:

(i) There are no reasonable and prudent alternatives to the proposed action;

(ii) The benefits of such action clearly outweigh the benefits of alternative courses of action consistent with conserving the species or its critical habitat, and such action is in the public interest;

(iii) The action is of regional or national significance; and

(iv) Neither the Federal agency concerned nor the exemption applicant made any irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources prohibited by section 7(d) of the Act; and,

(2) It establishes such reasonable mitigation and enhancement measures, including, but not limited to, live propagation, transplantation, and habitat acquisition and improvement, as are necessary and appropriate to minimize the adverse effects of the proposed action upon the endangered species, threatened species, or critical habitat concerned. Any required mitigation and enhancement measures shall be carried out and paid for by the exemption applicant.

(b) *Decision and order.* The Committee's final determinations shall be documented in a written decision. If the Committee determines that an exemption should be granted, the Committee shall issue an order granting the exemption and specifying required mitigation and enhancement measures. The Committee shall publish its decision and order in the FEDERAL REGISTER as soon as practicable.

(c) *Permanent exemptions.* Under section 7(h)(2) of the Act, an exemption granted by the Committee shall constitute a permanent exemption with respect to all endangered or threatened species for the purposes of completing such agency action—

(1) Regardless of whether the species was identified in the biological assessment, and

(2) Only if a biological assessment has been conducted under section 7(c) of the Act with respect to such agency action. Notwithstanding the foregoing, an exemption shall not be permanent if—

(i) The Secretary finds, based on the best scientific and commercial data available, that such exemption would result in the extinction of a species that was not the subject of consultation under section 7(a)(2) of the Act or was not identified in any biological assessment conducted under section 7(c) of the Act, and

(ii) The Committee determines within 60 days after the date of the Secretary's finding that the exemption should not be permanent.

If the Secretary makes a finding that the exemption would result in the extinction of a species, as specified above, the Committee shall meet with respect to the matter within 30 days after the date of the finding. During the 60 day period following the Secretary's determination, the holder of the exemption shall refrain from any action which would result in extinction of the species.

(d) *Finding by the Secretary of Defense.* If the Secretary of Defense finds in writing that an exemption for the agency action is necessary for reasons of national security, the Committee shall grant the exemption notwithstanding any other provision in this part.

§ 453.04 Committee information gathering.

(a) *Written submissions.* When the Chairman or four Committee members decide that written submissions are necessary to enable the Committee to make its final determinations, the Chairman shall publish a notice in the FEDERAL REGISTER inviting written submissions from interested persons.

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The notice shall include: (1) The address to which such submissions are to be sent; (2) the deadline for such submissions; and (3) a statement of the type of information needed.

(b) *Public hearing.* (1) When the Chairman or four Committee members decide that oral presentations are necessary to enable the Committee to make its final determinations, a public hearing shall be held.

(2) The public hearing shall be conducted by (i) the Committee or (ii) a member of the Committee or other person, designated by the Chairman or by four members of the Committee.

(3) *Notice.* The Chairman shall publish in the FEDERAL REGISTER a general notice of a public hearing, stating the time, place and nature of the public hearing.

(4) *Procedure.* The public hearing shall be open to the public and conducted in an informal manner. All information relevant to the Committee's final determinations shall be admissible, subject to the imposition of reasonable time limitations on oral testimony.

(5) *Transcript.* Public hearings will be recorded verbatim and a transcript thereof will be available for public inspection.

§ 453.05 Committee meetings.

(a) The committee shall meet at the call of the Chairman or five of its members.

(b) Five members of the Committee or their representatives shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of any function of the Committee, except that in no case shall any representative be considered in determining the

existence of a quorum for the transaction of a Committee function which involves a vote by the Committee on the Committee's final determinations.

(c) Only members of the Committee may cast votes. In no case shall any representative cast a vote on behalf of a member.

(d) Committee members appointed from the affected States shall collectively have one vote. They shall determine among themselves how it will be cast.

(e) All meetings and records of the Committee shall be open to the public.

(f) The Chairman shall publish a notice of all Committee meetings in the FEDERAL REGISTER. The notice will ordinarily be published at least 15 days prior to the meeting.

§ 453.06 Additional Committee powers.

(a) *Secure information.* Subject to the Privacy Act, the Committee may secure information directly from any Federal agency when necessary to enable it to carry out its duties.

(b) *Subpoenas.* For the purpose of obtaining information necessary for the consideration of an application for an exemption, the Committee may issue subpoenas for the attendance and testimony of witnesses and the production of relevant papers, books, and documents.

(c) *Rules and orders.* The Committee may issue and amend such rules and orders as are necessary to carry out its duties.

(d) *Delegate authority.* The Committee may delegate its authority under paragraphs (a) and (b) of this section to any member.