

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) invites comments on this information collection for which approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) will be requested.

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by July 19, 2019.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas Dickson, Rural Development Innovation Center—Regulatory Team, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, STOP 1522, Washington, DC 20250, Telephone: 202-690-4492, email: thomas.dickson@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) regulation (5 CFR part 1320) implementing provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) requires that interested members of the public and affected agencies have an opportunity to comment on information collection and recordkeeping activities (see 5 CFR 1320.8(d)). This notice identifies an information collection that the Agency is submitting to OMB for extension.

Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the Agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology. Comments may be sent to: Thomas Dickson, Rural Development Innovation Center—Regulatory Team, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, STOP 1522, Washington, DC 20250, Telephone: 202-690-4492, email: thomas.dickson@usda.gov.

Title: Broadband Grant Program.

OMB Control Number: 0572-0127.

Type of Request: Extension of a currently approved information collection.

Abstract: The provision of broadband transmission service is vital to the economic development, education,

health, and safety of rural Americans. To further this objective, RUS provides financial assistance in the form of grant to eligible entities that propose, on a "community-oriented connectivity" basis, to provide broadband transmission service that fosters economic growth and delivers enhanced educational, health care, and public safety services to extremely rural, lower income communities. The Agency gives priority to rural areas that it believes have the greatest need for broadband transmission services. Grant authority is utilized to deploy broadband infrastructure to extremely rural, lower income communities on a "community-oriented connectivity" basis. The "community-oriented connectivity" concept integrates the deployment of broadband infrastructure with the practical, everyday uses and applications of the facilities. This broadband access is intended to promote economic development and provide enhanced educational and health care opportunities. The Agency provides financial assistance to eligible entities that are proposing to deploy broadband transmission service in rural communities where such service does not currently exist and who will connect the critical community facilities including the local schools, libraries, hospitals, police, fire and rescue services and who will operate a community center that provides free and open access to residents.

Estimate of Burden: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 140.84 hours per response.

Respondents: Public bodies, commercial companies, cooperatives, nonprofits, Indian tribes, and limited dividend or mutual associations and must be incorporated or a limited liability company.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 82.

Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent: 1.16.

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 13,380.

Copies of this information collection can be obtained from Diane M. Berger, Rural Development Innovation Center—Regulatory Team, (715) 619-3124.

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Chad Rupe,

Acting Administrator, Rural Utilities Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

[Docket No.: 190430420-9420-01]

Commerce Alternative Personnel System

AGENCY: Office of Administration, Office of Human Resources Management, Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: This notice announces the expansion of employee coverage under the Commerce Alternative Personnel System (CAPS), formerly the Department of Commerce Personnel Management Demonstration Project, published in the **Federal Register** on December 24, 1997. This coverage is extended to include employees of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) located in the Northeast Fisheries Science Center.

DATES: The amended Commerce Alternative Personnel System is effective May 20, 2019.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Department of Commerce—Sandra Thompson, U.S. Department of Commerce, 1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 51020, Washington, DC 20230, (202) 482-0056 or Valerie Smith at (202) 482-0272.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1. Background

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) approved the Department of Commerce (DoC) demonstration project for an alternative personnel management system, and published the final plan in the **Federal Register** on Wednesday, December 24, 1997 (62 FR 67434). The demonstration project was designed to simplify current classification systems for greater flexibility in classifying work and paying employees; establish a performance management and rewards system for improving individual and organizational performance; and improve recruiting and examining to attract highly-qualified candidates. The purpose of the project was to strengthen the contribution of human resources management and test whether the same innovations conducted under the National Institute of Standards and Technology alternative personnel management system would produce similarly successful results in other DoC environments. The project was implemented on March 29, 1998. The project plan has been modified thirteen times to clarify certain DoC Demonstration Project authorities, and

to extend and expand the project: 64 FR 52810 (September 30, 1999); 68 FR 47948 (August 12, 2003); 68 FR 54505 (September 17, 2003); 70 FR 38732 (July 5, 2005); 71 FR 25615 (May 1, 2006); 71 FR 50950 (August 28, 2006); 74 FR 22728 (May 14, 2009); 80 FR 25 (January 2, 2015); 81 FR 20322 (April 7, 2016); 81 FR 40653 (June 22, 2016); 81 FR 54787 (August 17, 2016); 82 FR 1688 (January 6, 2017); and 83 FR 54707 (October 31, 2018). With the passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, Public Law 110–161, on December 26, 2007, the project was made permanent (extended indefinitely) and renamed the Commerce Alternative Personnel System (CAPS).

CAPS provides for modifications to be made as experience is gained, results are analyzed, and conclusions are reached on how the system is working. This notice announces that the DoC expands CAPS to include bargaining unit employees in the NMFS located in the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC).

The DoC will follow the CAPS plan as published in the **Federal Register** on December 24, 1997, and subsequent modifications as listed in the Background Section of this notice.

Kevin E. Mahoney,

Director for Human Resources Management and Chief Human Capital Officer.

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I. Executive Summary

CAPS is designed to (1) improve hiring and allow DoC to compete more effectively for high-quality candidates through direct hiring, selective use of higher entry salaries, and selective use of recruitment incentives; (2) motivate and retain staff through higher pay potential, pay-for-performance, more responsive personnel systems, and selective use of retention incentives; (3) strengthen the manager's role in personnel management through delegation of personnel authorities; and (4) increase the efficiency of personnel systems through the installation of a simpler and more flexible classification system based on pay banding, through reduction of guidelines, steps, and paperwork in classification, hiring, and other personnel systems, and through automation.

The current participating organizations include 1 office of the Deputy Secretary in the Office of the Secretary, 6 offices of the Chief Financial Officer/Assistant Secretary for Administration in the Office of the

Secretary; the Bureau of Economic Analysis; 2 units of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA); The Institute for Telecommunication Sciences and the First Responder Network Authority (an independent authority within NTIA); and 12 units of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: The Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service, the National Weather Service—Space Environment Center, the National Ocean Service, the Program Planning and Integration Office, the Office of the Under Secretary, the Marine and Aviation Operations, the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, the Office of Human Capital Services, formerly the Workforce Management Office, and the Office of the Chief Information Officer.

This amendment modifies the December 24, 1997, **Federal Register** notice. Specifically, it expands DoC CAPS to include NMFS bargaining unit employees located in the NEFSC.

II. Basis for CAPS Expansion

A. Purpose

CAPS is designed to provide supervisors/managers at the lowest organizational level the authority, control, and flexibility to recruit, retain, develop, recognize, and motivate its workforce, while ensuring adequate accountability and oversight.

NMFS is responsible for the stewardship of the nation's ocean resources and their habitat. NMFS provide vital services for the nation including productive and sustainable fisheries, safe sources of seafood, the recovery and conservation of protected resources, and healthy ecosystems. NMFS works in partnership with Regional Fishery Management Councils to assess and predict the status of fish stocks, set catch limits, ensure compliance with fisheries regulations, and reduce bycatch. Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act, NMFS works to recover protected marine species while allowing economic and recreational opportunities. Since the inception of the demonstration project in 1997, and subsequent modification/expansion notices, units of NMFS have participated in CAPS. A September 17, 2003, notice (68 FR 54505) announced the expansion of CAPS to include non-bargaining unit employees located in the NEFSC. With the majority of NEFSC employees being covered by an alternative personnel management

system, NOAA and NMFS made the determination to convert the remaining bargaining unit GS NEFSC workforce under CAPS.

The expansion of CAPS coverage to include the remaining bargaining unit GS employees of NEFSC will allow NMFS to continue to benefit from the flexibilities provided by CAPS and should improve the organization's ability to recruit and retain a high-quality workforce.

DoC's CAPS allows for modifications of procedures if no new waiver from law or regulation is added. Given that this expansion is in accordance with existing law and regulation and CAPS is a permanent alternative personnel system, the DoC is authorized to make the changes described in this notice.

B. Participating Employees

Employee notification of this expansion will be accomplished by providing a full set of briefings to employees and managers and providing them electronic access to all CAPS policies and procedures, including the thirteen previous **Federal Register** notices and this **Federal Register** notice will also be accessible electronically upon approval. Subsequent supervisor training and informational briefings for all employees will be accomplished prior to the implementation date of the expansion.

C. Labor Participation

The Labor organization was notified about the CAPS expansion pertaining to their bargaining unit membership. Bargaining unit employees are covered by AFGE Local 231, Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

III. Changes to the Project Plan

The CAPS at DoC, published in the **Federal Register** on December 24, 1997 (62 FR 67434), is amended as follows:

1. The following organization will be added to the project plan, Section II D—Participating Organizations Within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Additional employees in the following:
Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)
2. The following bargaining units are added to the project plan, Section II F—Labor Participation Table 4—Bargaining Unit Coverage

NEFSC Woods Hole, AFGE Local
MA. 231.

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