

Wildlife Services Directive

4.104
June 20, 2013

PERSONAL USE OF NEW MEDIA BY WS PERSONNEL

1. PURPOSE

To establish guidance for use of new media by Wildlife Services (WS) personnel on their personal time.

2. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This is a new directive.

3. AUTHORITY

Authority to develop guidelines for use of new media by WS personnel is derived from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Departmental Regulation 1495-001, New Media Roles, Responsibilities and Authorities, dated May 23, 2011.

4. POLICY

a. It is WS policy that WS personnel may responsibly engage in unofficial internet postings about matters related to their personal experiences, interests, knowledge, and professional expertise. Consistent with other forms of communications, WS personnel are responsible for all content they publish on their personal social networking sites, blogs or other websites.

b. Personnel are not permitted to claim or otherwise represent that their opinion(s) or personal new media content is officially sanctioned or officially represents the Department or its policies. Personnel are likewise prohibited from displaying any official U.S. Government, USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), or WS seals or logos on their personal new media sites.

5. BACKGROUND

WS supports APHIS and the Department in using official new media outlets to communicate with the public about Government programs and activities. This Directive is intended to provide employees with guidance when utilizing new media in their personal capacity in order to avoid any appearance of representing or acting on behalf of WS, APHIS, or USDA.

6. DEFINITIONS

a. New Media: Technologies (mobile and web-based tools and applications) that facilitate social interactions/activities among people; examples of new media outlets are YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

b. Public Trust Activities: Activities in furtherance of the public's interest and investment in natural and agricultural resources.

c. Social Networking: Activities that include, but are not limited to blogs, photograph and video sharing services, geospatial mapping tools, discussion forums, and wikis.

c. WS Personnel: Any Federal employee, State employee, student intern, or volunteer working under the auspices of a WS-sanctioned program.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

a. It is important that all WS personnel are mindful of the implications of statements made using social media, and in online conversations, that make reference to the USDA, APHIS or WS programs. WS personnel are potentially viewed as spokespersons and should be aware that the USDA, APHIS or WS may be held responsible or accountable for their behavior, statements and opinions in that capacity.

b. Personnel who engage in social networking and identify themselves as employees of WS, or who have public-facing positions and are readily associated with WS programs, must evaluate their social networking profiles – including those maintained for personal use – to ensure that any content that is posted is consistent with their status as a WS professional engaged in public trust activities.

c. When using new media in an unofficial or personal capacity, WS personnel shall not:

(1) Post or share content that may leave the reader with the impression that the employee's statements or material represent the official or unofficial position of the USDA, APHIS or WS programs. To the extent that any content could be misconstrued as representing the official or unofficial position of USDA, APHIS or WS, the employee must post a conspicuous disclaimer that indicates the content and opinions expressed are solely those of the poster and do not reflect the positions of the USDA, APHIS, or WS.

(2) Post or share material that shows WS uniform components, logos, trademarks, or other materials that identify or belong to WS, WS partners, or cooperators.

(3) Engage in political activity prohibited under the Hatch Act, including but not limited to, soliciting, accepting, or receiving political contributions or hosting, inviting others to, or sponsoring a political fundraiser.

(4) Engage in non-political fundraising that involves solicitations on behalf of third parties that seek official USDA action; conduct business with USDA; engage in activities regulated by USDA; or, have interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of a Federal employee's official duties.

(5) Post or share any agency-related information that is not already considered public information. The discussion or sharing of non-public information is strictly prohibited; the prohibition extends to discussing or sharing information that through malfeasance is in the public domain.

(6) Post or share photographs taken or documents developed, during the course of their or their colleagues' official duty, unless that photograph or document has been previously released through official channels.

(7) Post or share information that is prohibited from disclosure pursuant to Section 1619 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 or any Federal statute, regulation, or policy.

(8) Receive compensation from a non-Federal source for teaching, speaking, or writing that relates to that employee's official duties.

8. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to WS personnel.

9. REFERENCES

- a. Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Pub. L. No.110-234, §1619, 122 Stat. 923, 1022-23 (2008).
- b. U.S. Office of Government Ethics, Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch (July 2011).



William H. Clay
Deputy Administrator