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The Office of Management and Budget
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World Wildlife Fund's Comments on a Proposed Revision of OMB Circular No. A-119, "Federal Participation in the Development and Use of Voluntary Consensus Standards and in Conformity Assessment Activities"

For almost 50 years, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has been protecting the future of nature. Today WWF is the largest multinational conservation organization in the world, with programs in more than 100 countries, 1.2 million members in the United States, and more than 5 million members worldwide. WWF thanks you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed revision of OMB Circular No. A-119 and submits the comments below on behalf of our organization and our members.

Encouraging Agency Use of Standards and Participation in Standards Development

WWF supports the proposed changes in Circular A-119 to provide more detailed guidance on how Federal representatives should participate in the standards development process, including better internal and interagency coordination on the development, utilization, and updating of standards.

Consensus and Other Standards

WWF supports OMB's longstanding and continued recognition of both voluntary standards and other standards developed by non-governmental entities. WWF asks that OMB continue language such as in section 6(a) that advises federal agencies on the appropriate consideration of voluntary standards other than consensus standards.

WWF supports OMB's interpretation of circumstances under which federal agencies should consider voluntary standards other than consensus standards. Federal agencies' are often directed by statute or executive order to play a leadership role where health, safety, or environmental protection is at issue. In a review of existing standards, agencies may not find an appropriate consensus standard that demonstrates appropriate leadership practices. OMB's interpretation of consensus standard application allows flexibility in those situations when an appropriate consensus standard does not exist. The Circular could further clarify its guidance with the following language in section 6(a) [additions underlined]:

“... particularly in emerging technology areas or when trying to accomplish important health, safety, or environment protection objectives. Therefore, in instances where there are no suitable voluntary consensus standards, agencies should consider ... other voluntary standards that deliver the most generally favorable technical, health, safety, environmental, and economic outcomes ...”

Changes to Voluntary Consensus Standard

WWF supports OMB's emphasis on a factor-based, case-by-case determination when a federal agency is determining whether a standard is a voluntary consensus standard. In the context of the Circular and its preference for voluntary consensus standards over government-unique standards, it is important that



OMB avoid imposing a one-size-fits-all method for developing consensus standards, which could have the unintended consequence of reducing the availability of essential standards to federal agencies.

Federal agencies tasked with implementing the revised circular would benefit from a clear statement with respect to voluntary consensus standards already in use. WWF suggests that OMB consider adding a statement that the revisions are not intended to decrease the current body of standards deemed voluntary consensus standards, nor impose a higher bar than under the 1998 Circular for an agency to deem a standards body to be a voluntary consensus standard body.

Conclusion

WWF welcomes the opportunity to comment and would be happy to provide further information or clarifications if necessary.

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