

[EXTERNAL] Friends OMB 1018

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To: Info_Coll, FWHQ <info_coll@fws.gov>

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Friends groups are “independent” nonprofit organizations whose nonprofit status is certified by the state in which they reside. Many are governed by a board of directors and are guided by mission statements and procedural policies. They are supported by membership dues and donations which are used to cover their operating expenses. For the most part they are all volunteer organizations. It is important to note that, because of overlapping jurisdictions in their area or regions, many friends groups have partnership agreements with other state and federal agencies in addition to the USFWS agreements.

It is important that a distinction be made between funds collected on USFWS federal properties and membership dues and donations which are collected for, and managed by the nonprofit friends group. An annual report can include both as long as their status is clearly identified.

Many volunteers wear more than one hat. They may be a friends group volunteer, and also sign up as a USFWS volunteer for the purpose of assisting the refuges with special projects, etc. As formal USFWS volunteers they are subject to USFWS rules and policies and receive direction from the refuge staff. They may be subject to background checks. I do not think background checks are necessary for nonprofit friends groups volunteers. It would not be cost effective and would be an unnecessary burden to the friends group.

THE USFWS is the most underfunded agency in the federal government. In many cases friends groups volunteers have stepped in to provide basic services that would normally be carried out by refuge staff. As you do your final analysis, make sure you are not over regulating.

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