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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

February 3, 2012

Mr. Scott B. Quehl
Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Secretary for Administration
U. S. Department of Commerce

Dear Mr. Quehl:

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) is beginning a review examining a potential merger of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) into the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) within the Department of the Interior. This review will be conducted under engagement code 361381. GAO is beginning this work in response to a request made by the Senate Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security. The objectives of this review are to determine: (1) how would federal fisheries and protected species management potentially be affected by moving NMFS into FWS and (2) what factors should be considered if Congress were to move NMFS into FWS and what management practices could facilitate such a move?

In conducting this review, we plan to contact officials within the Department of Commerce, NOAA, and NMFS, as well as those in other NOAA line offices as necessary. Additionally, we anticipate working with officials from Interior and FWS. Our audit work will be conducted at headquarters and at regional locations, as appropriate. We would appreciate your notifying the appropriate offices in your agency and identifying a point of contact for this engagement. We expect to begin work on these issues immediately and would like to hold an entrance conference during the week of February 13, 2012.

This engagement will be conducted under the direction of Anu Mittal, Director, Natural Resources and Environment team, who can be contacted at 202-512-3841 or mittala@gao.gov. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Steve Secrist, Assistant Director, at 415-904-2236 or secrists@gao.gov or Jonathan Dent, Analyst-in-Charge, at 206-287-4879 or dentj@gao.gov.

Sincerely yours,

Orice Williams Brown
Managing Director, Financial Markets
and Community Investment

cc: Peter Petrianni, GAO Liaison Officer
Mack A. Cato, Director, NOAA Audit, Internal Control, and Information Management
Staff Office