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Consumers for Paper Options Urges U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to Rescind Decision to Go Paperless

FWS Suspension of Printed Newsletters & Other Periodicals Marginalizes Those without Internet Access or Comfort with Technology

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 14, 2016) – [Consumers for Paper Options](#), a coalition of individuals and organizations advocating for access to important paper-based services and information, today urged the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to rescind its decision to suspend the printing of its newsletters, updates, and other periodicals. The decision was announced in a January 6, 2016 memorandum to the FWS Directorate from Service Deputy Director Steve Guertin.

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the latest federal agency to make a misguided attempt to go paperless without congressional oversight or public comment,” said John Runyan, executive director of Consumers for Paper Options. “Every agency should be as efficient as possible, but when more than a quarter of the U.S. population doesn’t have access to broadband Internet, the government simply can’t eliminate important paper-based information.”

Runyan continued, “All Americans deserve fair and equal access to government services and resources. That is why we are working with members of Congress to raise awareness about the need to maintain the right to paper options.”

Even though Pew Research Center data shows that 33 percent of Americans lack broadband Internet access and 45 percent of seniors do not own a computer, the federal government is increasingly eradicating paper-based resources and information. Directives from the Internal Revenue Service, the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and other agencies have forcibly removed paper options for essential government services, including savings bonds, tax forms and instructions, Social Security earnings statements, federal benefits checks, pension information, shareholder reports and more. As a result, Americans across the country are left with nowhere to turn to access the information they need.

Members of Congress are now working on three major legislative initiatives to protect Americans’ ability to choose paper-format statements and resources:

- **PROTECTING ACCESS TO INVESTMENT MATERIALS:** The SEC has proposed regulation (Rule 30e-3), which would eliminate the current default requirement for mutual funds to transmit shareholder reports and other important information to investors in paper form—allowing investors to be switched without their consent. Implementing this change will potentially harm millions of investors—the majority of whom have already expressed a preference for paper-based investment materials. Reps. Bruce Poliquin (R-Maine) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) are leading critical efforts in Congress to block this dangerous rule.

- **PRESERVING ACCESS TO PAPER SAVINGS BONDS:** The SAVINGS Act (S. 2478/ H.R. 1652)—introduced in the House by Rep. Matthew Cartwright (D-Pa.) and in the Senate by Sens. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine)—protects access to savings bonds, which are no longer sold in paper form, by preserving the Tax-Time Savings Bond Program through 2020. The Tax-Time Savings Bond Program allows taxpayers to receive their tax refunds via savings bond(s), but the Treasury has only committed to maintain the program through the 2016 tax season.
- **REINSTATING ACCESS TO TAX FORMS:** H.R. 3673, introduced by Rep. Dan Benishek (R-Mich.), would help Americans gain access to critical paper tax forms and instructions, which are no longer mailed and not reliably available at libraries and post offices. Recognizing that millions of Americans still file by mail due to connectivity issues, discomfort with computers or rising cybersecurity concerns, H.R. 3673 requires the Secretary of the Treasury to mail paper forms and instructions to individuals who filed a paper return for the preceding tax year.

About Consumers for Paper Options

Consumers for Paper Options brings together industry, non-profits and consumers in an effort to address the transition to Internet-only resources at the exclusion of millions of citizens. Consumers for Paper Options is united in the belief that paper-based communications are critically important for millions of Americans, especially seniors and American households without Internet access. While regulated entities and governments at every level need to streamline services, cut costs and improve efficiencies, the goal of Consumers for Paper Options is to preserve access in a way that neither hinders the natural evolution of technology nor discriminates against those who may not, or cannot, use it. For more information, visit www.paperoptions.org.

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