

CONSERVING HABITAT FOR SPECIES



Working hand in hand with those at the local level, we will chart a course that will use the strengths of each to bolster the conservation of our fish, wildlife and other natural resources to benefit the American people.

Secretary Gale A. Norton, November 15, 2001

In 2003 the Department of the Interior will focus on achieving improved results in the preservation of species and habitat. The ultimate goal of this effort will be to establish a framework for conservation in partnership with States and others to conserve species and prevent the need for listing under the Endangered Species Act. For example, through the Partners in Flight program, the Fish and Wildlife Service partners with others to protect migratory birds, conserve species, and prevent their decline. The Secretary is committed to the recovery of endangered species, fulfilling the goals of the Endangered Species Act, while maintaining healthy communities and a dynamic economy that depends on the Nation's lands and water. Improved results in this area will demonstrate that Federal, State, local, and private partnerships can successfully protect and preserve imperiled species and their habitat.

The national wildlife refuge system's network of lands provides refuge for wildlife and habitat for 260 threatened and endangered species. Comprising a diverse array of habitats, the system serves as a model of stewardship managed cooperatively through the efforts of Federal and State agencies, private organizations, and individuals to conserve species.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF CONSERVATION ON OUR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

On March 14, 1903, Theodore Roosevelt established the first national wildlife refuge when he created the five-acre Pelican Island Reservation on Florida's east coast to protect a pelican colony. Today, the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge provides nearly 5,000 acres of refuge for an abundance of wildlife, including the West Indian manatee, juvenile sea turtles, and wood storks.

Pelican Island is now part of a nationwide system of 538 wildlife refuge units, spanning 95 million acres in all 50 States. The national wildlife refuge system's unique and diverse network of lands and water provides "stepping stones" of habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife; sanctuary for hundreds of the Nation's endangered species; and aquatic habitat for fish. While wildlife conserva-

The refuge system is a treasure that belongs to us all, and we all need to work together to ensure it remains healthy.

Secretary Gale A. Norton, November 15, 2001

tion is the primary purpose of the refuge system, refuges also benefit people. In 2001, the refuge system attracted 39 million visitors for activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. The system's 2,700 staff partner with more than 200 community-based groups and 30,000 volunteers, who provide in-kind services such as assisting in wildlife surveys and habitat restoration, as well as raising funds for substantial projects such as facility construction.

The 2003 budget provides \$376.5 million for operation and maintenance of the national wildlife refuge system, an increase of \$56.5 million over 2002. Refuge operations funding is increased by \$25.8 million, or 11 percent, and maintenance funding is increased by \$30.7 million, or nearly 40 percent. For the first time, in 2001 the deferred maintenance project backlog was reduced, from

\$673 million to \$663 million. Funding for both annual preventive and deferred maintenance helped to achieve this result. With additional funding in 2003, this maintenance backlog will be further reduced.

The FWS is improving the accuracy of its backlog estimates by conducting facility condition assessments at all of its refuges. About 20 percent of the site assessments were completed in 2001; remaining sites will be completed at the rate of 20 percent per year through 2005. In total, the 2003 budget for refuge maintenance is \$107.7 million, of which \$25.2 million will be used to address deferred maintenance projects. The deferred maintenance increase will address critical health and safety and resource protection projects and projects that improve visitor access and enjoyment. Projects are to be completed in preparation for the refuge centennial and include fixing broken boardwalks and

Bridging the Century – from Pelican Island to Cat Island



In its nearly 99 years of existence, the national wildlife refuge system has selectively acquired unique, wildlife-rich habitats. One of the newest refuges, Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge, in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana has one of the highest densities of old-growth bald cypress trees in the Nation, including the 800 year-old national champion, standing 83 feet tall and



measuring 53 feet around. The refuge preserves a valuable forested wetlands complex important to neotropical migratory bird habitat in the Lower Mississippi River ecosystem. Like Pelican Island, it provides habitats for many species of wading birds and is a sanctuary for migratory bird waterfowl. Cat Island will be preserved for "wildlife first" and will provide outstanding recreational opportunities for Americans.

repairing trails and boat ramps. A \$2.0 million increase is requested to continue implementation of a new maintenance management system at 200 additional sites piloted since October 2001 at 11 sites. The remaining increase in maintenance will be used to enhance annual maintenance; establish an innovative equipment replacement fund; and expand the usage of alternative fueled vehicles.

The 2003 budget increases funding for refuge operations by \$25.8 million, including a \$3.7 million transfer to consolidate land acquisition planning with other refuge planning activities. The request includes a program increase of \$20.0 million that includes \$12.0 million for high-priority staffing and mission critical projects. These projects include activities such as providing \$187,000 for the Wolfweed Wetlands project at the San Barnard Refuge in Texas. The program increase also includes \$1.0 million to accelerate the completion of comprehensive conservation plans; \$5.0 million for the Cooperative Conservation Initiative; and \$2.0 million for an innovative visitor facility enhancement program to undertake small-scale projects such as observation decks and kiosks that enhance access to wildlife and improve visitor experiences at low cost.

ENDANGERED SPECIES CONSERVATION

Endangered species conservation is not simply a Federal matter – it's a State and local issue as well. We all bring something to the table. Together we can get the job done – and hopefully with less conflict and litigation.

Secretary Gale A. Norton, December 5, 2001

The 2003 budget continues the Four C's approach to endangered species conservation through enhanced support of State and local efforts from FWS grant programs. The budget also increases direct Federal activities supporting these efforts.

A number of FWS grant programs assist State and local communities in their conservation efforts to benefit federally listed, proposed, or candidate species, and other imperiled species. These grant programs include the Landowner Incentive and Private Stewardship grant programs discussed

earlier, the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund, and the Multi-National Species Conservation Fund. Other FWS grant programs benefit a broader array of wildlife, including the State and Tribal Wildlife and the North American Wetland grant programs. The 2003 budget includes \$259.6 million for these programs.

The Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund, first funded in 1992 at \$6.6 million, is funded at \$91.0 million in 2003. In 2001, FWS expanded the types of assistance

Improving Visitor Experiences at New York's Refuges

The Long Island NWR Complex encompasses some of the last remnant wildlife habitat along the New England coast. Its proximity to New York



City makes it one of the most threatened and appreciated refuges. The 2003 budget request provides \$172,000 to enhance visitor facilities at this complex. These enhancements will provide greater access and enjoyment to an estimated 490,000 annual visitors. Funds will be used to construct a

boardwalk, a kiosk, and an observation blind; improve signage; create brochures and interpretive displays; and extend nature trails.

Preserving Species Before a Crisis in Tennessee

Candidate conservation funds have assisted landowners in central Tennessee in implementing habitat protection activities for several species dependent upon spring and sea habitats, including the Barrens topminnow (a species of concern) and the Sequatchie caddisfly (a candidate species). Eight landowners have agreed to put up livestock exclusion fencing and install water tanks, which are designed to keep cattle out of the springs and spring runs inhabited by fish. Several landowners have also allowed reintroduction of the Barrens topminnow, effectively doubling the numbers of known population of the species. Another owner has agreed to implement measures to protect habitat for the Sequatchie caddisfly. Together, these actions may sufficiently address the threats that could necessitate listing the Barrens topminnow and the Sequatchie caddisfly.

public parties. The FWS works closely with the States to identify candidates and other imperiled species most likely to benefit from agreements and to identify and contact landowners whose properties support these species. As of December 31, 2001, there were currently 81 candidate conservation agreements. At the 2003 request level, FWS expects to finalize 38 additional agreements. In 2001, these agreements helped prevent the listing of five species.

An increase of \$2.5 million is requested for the endangered species recovery program. Through the recovery program, FWS works with others to improve the condition of endangered species to the point where they can be delisted. Increased funding would be applied to direct actions to stabilize critically endangered species on the brink of extinction; work with partners to recover listed species; complete the recovery planning process for species that lack plans; and delist or downlist species as their status improves. The FWS estimates that five species may be delisted in 2003, including the Tinian monarch, Columbian white-tailed deer, and Johnston's frankenia. Other species, such as the American crocodile, are expected to be downlisted from endangered to threatened.

provided under this program by establishing two new grants: recovery land acquisition and habitat conservation planning assistance. Recovery land acquisition grants assist States in acquiring lands essential to the recovery of listed species. The habitat conservation plan assistance grants provide States with support in developing and implementing HCPs. These plans, approved by FWS, allow private landowners and State and local governments to use or develop their property while promoting ESA-listed species conservation.

The 2003 request for FWS endangered species operations is \$125.7 million. The budget includes a \$2.0 million increase to assist FWS in meeting the growing demands for inter-agency consultations, technical assistance, and HCPs. The budget also increases funding for activities that prevent species from being listed and achieve recovery of listed species.

A program increase of \$1.4 million is requested for the candidate conservation program. The candidate conservation program seeks to prevent species from being listed through candidate conservation agreements, voluntary conservation agreements between FWS and one or more private or

Within the endangered species listing program, the budget shifts \$1.0 million from critical habitat designations for already listed species to help extend ESA protection to additional species like the Miami blue butterfly in Florida. The increased funding would be dedicated to preparing proposed listing rules for six to eight additional high-priority candidate species and responding to citizen petitions for listing actions.

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES ON BLM PUBLIC LANDS

The number of federally listed threatened or endangered species found on public lands has increased from 152 to 306 in the past 10 years. The BLM actively engages in conservation planning to address at-risk species before they are listed. Many at-risk species are wide-ranging species that inhabit large areas of the West. For example, BLM manages 70 million acres of sagebrush habitats and watersheds that could provide healthy habitats for 29 at-risk species of birds, 49 mammals, 18



reptiles, three amphibians, 106 fish, 94 invertebrates, and 331 plant species.

Restoration and maintenance of suitable habitat on public lands for listed species will allow BLM to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands, while providing for commercial and non-commercial activities. A \$1.0 million increase will enable BLM to engage in cooperative habitat conservation planning efforts with partners including FWS. The BLM will initiate conservation plans in three regions in 2003. Each plan will address all special status species in addition to listed species and will incorporate assessments of both the species and their habitats within the region covered by the plan. Among the species to receive special attention in 2003 are the greater sage grouse in the Wyoming Basin region, the Gunnison sage grouse in the Colorado Plateau region, and the mountain plover, lesser prairie chicken, and prairie dog in the prairies and plains.

SCIENCE ON PUBLIC LANDS

The 2003 USGS budget request focuses resources on its core mission responsibilities, with priority given to those programs that most directly address the science needs of Interior's resource management bureaus. The USGS will continue to

collaborate with the Interior land and resource management bureaus to identify and prioritize their science needs to enhance USGS's responsiveness to these high priority information needs.

In 2003, the USGS budget maintains full funding for a number of programs that have received significant increases in recent years. These programs provide valuable science support to other Interior bureaus to enable them to more effectively and efficiently fulfill their resource management responsibilities. Key among these is the Gap Analysis program, funded at \$6.9 million, and the National Biological Information Infrastructure, funded at \$6.0 million. The Gap Analysis program generates biodiversity information that, among other uses, supports Interior efforts to enhance the protection of threatened and endangered species and their habitat. Through its continued implementation, the NBII will dramatically increase the availability of biological information to Interior resource managers and USGS researchers. They increasingly need quick and easy access to biological data from a multitude of sources to address complex biological resource management issues and to better anticipate emerging issues that may impact Interior lands and trust species.

CLEAN STREAMS

Acid mine drainage is the number one water pollutant in the coal fields of the Appalachian area, causing major environmental and public health problems. The Office of Surface Mining's Appalachian Clean Streams program operates in cooperation with participating States and watershed



organizations to reverse the aquatic damage resulting from abandoned coal mines and restore habitat for wildlife, fish, invertebrates, and plants. The 2003 budget continues funding for the program at \$10.0 million.

One example of the collaborative efforts that this program supports takes place in Maryland's Garrett County. Historians once noted the native brook trout fishing in the lower reaches of Cherry Creek and spawning runs of rainbow trout up-

stream. A fish kill attributed to acid mine drainage put an end to this sport fishery in 1957. Maryland's Bureau of Mines, working in collaboration with OSM and the Environmental Protection Agency, using Clean Streams funding, completed a reclamation project combining several technologies to reduce high concentrations of dissolved iron and aluminum and to reduce acidity of drainage. The project resulted in the restoration of 1.75 miles of stream and is a key component of the eventual restoration of Cherry Creek's trout fishery.