



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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NEW DIRECTOR FORESEES ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT, NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN AGENCY'S FUTURE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is embarking on a broad new effort to become the international leader in ecosystem management and conservation of biodiversity, while emphasizing partnerships with states, conservation groups, and private landowners, Director Mollie Beattie announced during her inaugural meeting with agency employees.

In addition, the Service will promote diversification of its workforce and encourage better opportunities for urban residents to enjoy the nation's bountiful fish and wildlife resources, Beattie said.

"No other agency is as prepared as we are to make ecosystem conservation its primary mission -- this is our mission," she told a gathering of 600 Washington office employees. "In the coming years, we will accomplish it from the old growth forests in the Pacific Northwest to the bayous of Louisiana to the 'river of grass' in Florida."

For example, Beattie said, the Service will seek to make the 491 National Wildlife Refuges "anchor points for biodiversity and ecosystem management.... Each refuge will have its own unique

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land management plan...showing the public where we are, where we are headed, and how they can participate."

Beattie also reaffirmed the Service's historic commitment to recreational use of wildlife. If ecosystems are kept healthy, she said, there will be abundant fish and wildlife so "Americans can enjoy our wildlife resources in whatever way they choose."

For the Service to be successful, however, the American people must understand that all species, including human beings, are connected, she said. As a result, the Service will make outreach and public education a high priority in the coming years.

"People need to understand that the choice between people and animals, between the economy and endangered species, is a false one," she said. "There is no choice. Our fate is inexorably linked to the state of the ecosystems that make up the global environment in which we live."

Americans "cannot dump contaminants into a river on Monday and expect to catch a fish on Friday," she said. "They cannot drain a wetland on Tuesday and expect to see ducks on Saturday...They cannot eliminate the habitat of their fellow species and expect our own to survive."

Beattie emphasized that the Service will seek partnerships with and the involvement of state and local governments, conservation organizations, business, and private landowners.

The Service already has been part of many highly successful partnerships, including the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, which has protected, restored, or enhanced more than 2 million acres of wetlands across the country, and the Partners for Wildlife program, which has restored more than 200,000 acres of wetlands on private lands.

Beattie said the Service will build on these partnerships and expand into new areas of cooperation, especially working with private landowners.

Beattie also said one of her goals is to increase the diversification of the Service's workforce by hiring and promoting women and minorities.

Such diversification is a "practical necessity" for helping the Service accomplish its goals, she said. People who come from different backgrounds have different perspectives on how problems can be solved and goals achieved.

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"The richness of experience is an asset, and its absence is an enormous liability," she said.

As part of this effort, the Service will reach out to people, such as inner city children, who do not have easy access to natural resources and may be less likely to grow up to become fish and wildlife biologists.

"The Service have done a fine job of reaching out in a variety of ways...", Beattie said. "I plan to expand this outreach even more in the coming years."

To facilitate the outreach and partnership effort, Beattie proposed an internal reorganization of the agency. Deputy Director Ken Smith would head a new division that includes the Public Affairs and Legislative Services offices, along with the Federal Aid program.

In addition, the Offices of International Affairs, Management Authority, and Scientific Authority would be placed under a newly created post of Assistant Director for International Affairs.

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