

The Fish and Wildlife Service

Protecting Habitat and History

Although the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a relative newcomer to the Department of the Interior, its origins can be traced to the Commission of Fish and Fisheries created in 1871 (later assigned to the Department of Commerce) and the Division of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy created in 1885 in the Department of Agriculture. Its role in protecting what we now consider cultural resources is nearly as old.

In 1872, the Commission began construction of the first federal fish hatchery in Northern California. The hatchery was intended to collect salmon eggs for shipping across the country by rail to replenish declining fisheries stocks along the Atlantic seaboard. Shortly after his arrival, the hatchery's manager, Livingston Stone, was approached by members of the McCloud River Indian Tribe. The hatchery's location was adjacent to an area used by the tribe for centuries as a burial ground, and there was widespread concern among tribal members that the area would be desecrated by Commission employees and other settlers. In what was likely one of the first federal efforts to protect a cultural area, Stone accepted a petition from the tribe in September 1874 requesting the Commission's assistance in protecting the burial ground from disturbance.

Over the ensuing 125-plus years, what became the FWS grew dramatically, adding new programs and acquiring lands to protect important fish and wildlife habitat. The bureau's role in protecting fish, wildlife, and wetlands is well-known nationally and internationally—its contributions to preserving our cultural heritage have been less visible.

Programs affiliated with the FWS were conceived at the end of the 19th century to address the decline of fish, wildlife, and other natural resources throughout the United States. Early efforts were modest and geared more toward research, but by the first decade of the 20th century, they began to expand and include land-management responsibilities. At the end of

President Theodore Roosevelt's administration in 1909, 53 federal wildlife reservations had been established by executive order and 48 fish hatcheries were in operation.

By 1940, when the Fish and Wildlife Service was established in the Department of the Interior by combining bureaus transferred from the departments of Commerce and Agriculture, there were over 260 national wildlife refuges and 100 fish hatcheries. The new Interior bureau was responsible for managing 13 million acres of land acquired to provide habitat for migratory birds, mammals, and fish. Four decades later, Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act adding 53 million acres to the National Wildlife Refuge System and mandating a planning program to identify and describe archeological and cultural sites in Alaska. Ninety-six years after acquisition of the first federal refuge, a three-acre island near Sebastian, Florida, the FWS land base has expanded to 93 million acres managed by nearly 600 field units located in every state and a number of U.S. territories and possessions.

In terms of historic preservation responsibilities, the FWS resembles other federal agencies in many respects. Each year it reviews thousands of projects to avoid or minimize damage to significant prehistoric and historic sites in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. A variety of other laws, executive orders, and regulations provide direction in such areas as law enforcement programs to deter theft and vandalism, protection of areas considered sacred by Native Americans, repatriation of human remains and burial goods to tribes, preservation of unique scientific and cultural collections, and maintenance of hundreds of historic buildings and structures. The FWS to date has identified over 11,000 archeological and historic sites on its lands, and hundreds of thousands of additional unrecorded sites are likely to exist. Prehistoric sites on Guam in the far western Pacific, cold war era buildings in Colorado, 19th-century homesteads in the midst of the

The Bertrand Collection

The Desoto National Wildlife Refuge in Iowa is home to a premier archeological collection of 200,000 artifacts excavated from the buried hull of the Steamboat *Bertrand*. In 1865, the boat hit a snag in the Missouri River 20 miles north of Omaha, Nebraska. Local legend indicated the ship carried whiskey, coins, and 500 flasks of mercury to be used in the mining process, a treasure trove worth hundreds of thousands of dollars! Salvors discovered the wreck on the refuge in 1968 and the following year its remains were excavated. Under the terms of an Antiquities Act permit, all artifacts were turned over to the FWS for permanent exhibition and preservation in a public



museum. The FWS built a new visitor center on the refuge in 1981 designed to store and display the salvaged items. In addition to the necessities of clothing, tools, and food, the collection also contains materials imported from Europe, alcoholic beverages and even powdered lemonade in a can.

Photo courtesy Desoto National Wildlife Refuge, FWS.

Okefenokee Swamp in southern Georgia, and a 1,400-year-old village site in the U.S. Virgin Islands exemplify the geographic and cultural diversity of these resources.

Information on the bureau's cultural resource work before the 1970s is sketchy. The FWS did receive considerable assistance from the National Park Service's Interagency Archeological Services program and others to identify, evaluate, and protect important sites on refuges and hatcheries after World War II. It hired its first cultural resource professional in 1977 to address management issues on national wildlife refuges in Alaska. By the early 1980s, FWS was hiring additional full-time staff in response to a growing workload associated with the NHPA and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act. The FWS currently employs about 20 cultural

resource professionals from a variety of academic disciplines, including archeology, history, anthropology and museum studies. Most are located in the agency's seven Regional Offices to provide oversight, support and compliance assistance to field stations. The bureau's preservation officer is located in the Washington Office's Division of Refuges.

The mission of the FWS to protect and enhance fish and wildlife benefits the preservation of cultural resources as well. If one examines the distribution of the bureau's land holdings, obvious patterns emerge. The rivers, lakes, coastal areas, and wetlands with which they are associated are not only critical to wildlife, but have been used by humans for thousands of years for subsistence, settlement and transportation. A good example is found at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge in Iowa, where the Steamboat *Bertrand*, sunk in 1865 while navigating the Missouri River to Montana's mining camps, was discovered in one of the river's former channels in 1969. Preserved with its cargo under 15 feet of silt, the boat was a time capsule illuminating 19th-century life on the American frontier. The refuge's visitor center exhibits many of the 200,000 recovered objects. For more web information on these exhibits, see web site: refuges.fws.gov/NWRSFiles/CulturalResources/Bertrand/Bertrand.html.

Numerous other refuges and hatcheries contain sites that are significant for a variety of reasons. Examples include:

- National historic landmarks established on Midway Atoll and Kiska and Attu Islands in the Aleutian chain contain remains from a series of pivotal World War II events in 1942 that turned the tide against Japan. Hundreds of associated sites are still intact on these remote outposts managed as national wildlife refuges. Work is planned during 1999 to rehabilitate and interpret historic structures on Midway and recover materials from the Aleutians.
- Some FWS cultural resources are significant because of their association with the history of the bureau and its predecessors. Two areas protected by President Theodore Roosevelt as wildlife reservations, Pelican Island in Florida and Lower Klamath Lake in California, were designated national historic landmarks for their association with early efforts to protect dwindling bird populations. Other examples

include light stations that played an important role in identifying and monitoring migratory birds along North America's flyways during the 1880s and 90s. The bureau has acquired some 20 light stations over the years to protect important habitat; they also offer opportunities for interpretive programs focusing on human adaptation to the environment. A number of these lighthouses have been repaired and maintained through federal grants and the support of local communities. The bureau's oldest program is credited to the D.C. Booth National Historic Fish Hatchery in Spearfish, South Dakota. Built in 1895, the hatchery complex includes a Victorian-era house listed on the National Register of Historic Places that is visited by over 120,000 people each year. The D.C. Booth Hatchery

recently added a curation facility to preserve unique historical collections.

- During the 1930s, refuges and hatcheries benefitted tremendously from work performed by thousands of young men stationed at Civilian Conservation Corps camps across the country. CCC enrollees were involved in the construction of roads, water control structures, and buildings, as well reforestation and soil conservation efforts. The program left an important cultural legacy as well. A number of field stations, such as the Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge in California, contain the remains of camps that help tell the story of this important era in American history.

What about the future? Two recent laws provide new direction for FWS-managed cultural resources. In 1997, President Clinton signed into law the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act to clarify the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Act directs the FWS to complete comprehensive plans for every refuge within a 15-year period that address, in part, the management of archeological and cultural sites. This is an important step forward. Likewise, the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer and Community Partnership Act of 1998 requires a new environmental education initiative promoting the understanding and conservation of fish, wildlife, habitat and cultural resources on refuges. Finally, the National Wildlife Refuge System is a dynamic entity, growing each year by an average of 100,000 acres. These new directions and growth bode well for the continued protection of critical wildlife habitat and the preservation of our history.

Clinton Hart Merriam (1855-1942)

Clinton Hart Merriam was the first Chief of the Division of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy and later the Bureau of Biological Survey, both predecessors to the FWS. During a 25-year federal career starting in 1885, he was instrumental in creating various programs to study North American mammals and birds, collecting evidence on the harm of exotic species to native flora and fauna, and mapping the continent's major wildlife zones. Merriam traveled extensively throughout the western United States and became acquainted with many Indian tribes in California. By the late 1890s, he had developed a deep interest in Native American culture, language, and mythology resulting in the publication of an article in *Science* in 1903 on Native American basket-making techniques. After his resignation as Chief of the Biological Survey in 1910, he pursued his interest in ethnology further in association with the Smithsonian Institution, continuing to publish articles and collect extensive information on tribal cultures until his death in 1942.



Photo courtesy FWS.

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