



# Agency Overview

## *Conserving the Nature of America*

*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.*



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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the premier government agency dedicated to the conservation, protection, and enhancement of fish, wildlife and plants, and their habitats. It is the only agency in the federal government whose primary responsibility is management of these important natural resources for the American public. The Service also helps ensure a healthy environment for people through its work benefiting wildlife, and by providing opportunities for Americans to enjoy the outdoors and our shared natural heritage.

The Service is responsible for implementing and enforcing some of our Nation's most important environmental laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and Lacey Act. The Service fulfills these and other statutory responsibilities through a diverse array of programs, activities, and offices that function to:

- Protect and recover threatened and endangered species
- Monitor and manage migratory birds
- Restore nationally significant fisheries
- Enforce federal wildlife laws and regulate international wildlife trade
- Conserve and restore wildlife habitat such as wetlands
- Help foreign governments conserve wildlife through international conservation efforts

- Distribute hundreds of millions of dollars to States, territories and tribes for fish and wildlife conservation projects

The Service also manages the 96 million acre National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's preeminent system of public lands devoted to protection and conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats. The 548 units of the Refuge System receive over 40 million visitors each year who participate in hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation, and other outdoor recreation activities. Within the Fisheries program, the Service operates 70 National Fish Hatcheries, which in conjunction with Fish Health Centers and Fish Technology Centers restore native aquatic populations, mitigate for fisheries lost as a result of federal water projects, and support recreational fisheries throughout the United States.

### **The Service Today**

The Service's origins date back to 1871 when Congress established the U.S. Fish Commission to study the decrease of the nation's food fishes and recommend ways to reverse the decline. Today, the Service utilizes 8,704 Full Time Equivalent Employees (FTEs), dedicated professionals located at facilities across the country, including a headquarters office in Arlington, VA, eight regional offices, and nearly 700 field offices.

The Service utilizes a diverse and largely decentralized organization to meet its conservation and management responsibilities. The headquarters office has primary responsibility for policy formulation and budget allocation within major program areas, while the Regional

offices have primary responsibility for implementation of these policies and management of field staff. This organizational structure allows the Service to address wildlife issues effectively at the regional, State and local level, as well as work effectively with a variety of partners, including other federal agencies, States, tribes, nongovernmental organizations and the public.

All of the Service's work is guided by a set of Conservation Principles. These include:

- **Stewardship** – Our ethic is to conserve natural resources for future generations.
- **People** – Our employees are our most valued asset.
- **Science** – Our work is grounded in thorough, objective science.
- **Partnerships** – We emphasize creative, innovative partnerships.
- **Professionalism** – We hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards, strive for excellence and respect others.
- **Legacy** – We ensure the future of natural resource conservation by connecting people with nature.
- **Service** – It is our privilege to serve the American people.

The Service's fiscal year 2009 budget request was \$2.2 billion, which included over \$800 million in permanent appropriations that is apportioned to the states and territories. Global climate change, shortages of clean water suitable for wildlife, and the alienation of children and adults from the natural world are critical challenges faced by the Service. In order to address these challenges, the Service has identified six priorities:

- **National Wildlife Refuge System** – Conserving Our Lands and Resources
- **Landscape Conservation** – Working with Others
- **Migratory Birds** – Conservation and Management

- **Threatened and Endangered Species** – Achieving Recovery and Preventing Extinction
- **Connecting People with Nature** – Ensuring the Future of Conservation
- **Aquatic Species** – National Fish Habitat Initiative and Trust Species

### Looking Forward

The Service is working to develop a unifying landscape-based scientific framework called "Strategic Habitat Conservation" that will apply conservation planning and design, conservation delivery, research and monitoring to large areas with many interconnected habitats and species. The purpose of the Strategic Habitat Conservation framework is to respond to the impact on fish, wildlife, and plants from climate change and other growing threats, such as habitat fragmentation, urbanization, invasive species, disease, parasites, and water management.

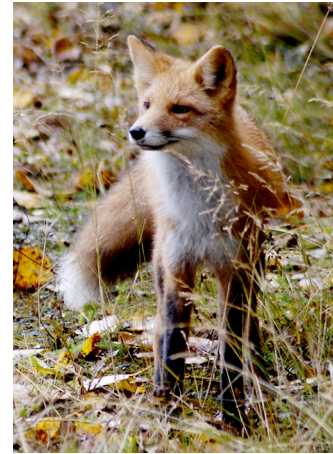
Strategic Habitat Conservation is the Service's framework for landscape conservation. It is a structured, science-driven approach for making decisions about where and how to expend Service resources for species, or groups of species to achieve explicit biological objectives. Ultimately, Strategic Habitat Conservation will allow the Service to work more effectively across landscapes with partners such as the U.S. Geological Survey, state and tribal wildlife agencies, conservation organizations, landowners and other concerned groups and individuals to in ways that recognize that the future environment may differ markedly from the past.

### An Introduction to the Organization

The following pages provide a brief overview of the major programs, resources, and organizational structure of the Service, as well as details on budgets, legal mandates, emerging issues and recent successes.



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