

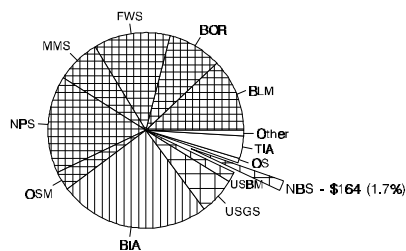


National Biological Service

Until Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt created the National Biological Service (NBS), all scientific research, inventory, monitoring and reports on America's biological resources were in the hands of regulators and politicians. Programs were fragmented and the science often addressed only parts of what were large and complex problems.

In fiscal year 1994, the Department consolidated that biological science expertise from seven other bureaus into one impartial, independent agency, with the goal that this agency would prove to be less expensive and more effective than small research clusters in each of several bureaus. Unlike its predecessors, NBS has no resource management responsibilities, lessening the chance that findings would seem tainted or be discredited because of suspicion that science was made subservient to the needs of policy-makers.

FY 1994 NBS Budget Authority
(\$ in millions)



Total DOI Budget Authority - \$9,663

Research on conservation of fish, wildlife, and other living resources is the primary NBS activity. The NBS research is based on the strong traditions of management-oriented research on fish, wildlife, and habitats developed in the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and other Interior bureaus contributing programs and scientists to the new organization.

Research on perennial management issues such as optimal management of harvested migratory birds,

resolution of resource issues in National Parks, and methods of restoring functions of degraded wetlands

continues undiminished. New NBS initiatives seek to solidify and build upon this core to make its benefits available across a greater range of issues and jurisdictions.

The National Biological Service provides the scientific understanding and technologies needed to support the sound management and conservation of our Nation's biological resources. The NBS provides information needed by resource managers in the Department of the Interior in a form that allows them to predict and manage the biological consequences of various policies and management practices. The NBS also works to identify and serve the science needs of a wide range of partners, including states and other Federal agencies.

For example, NBS offers the best scientific advice on waterfowl populations. The NBS scientists are experts in population monitoring, data management, reproductive and nesting success, effects of predators, habitat restoration, and wildlife disease. State, Federal, and international waterfowl managers use this critical science, knowing NBS has no stake in a particular management decision. Ultimately, it is citizens -- including hunters and bird-watchers -- who benefit from healthy flights of migratory waterfowl.

Partnerships: The scope of partnerships with states, other Federal agencies, and private institutions has been expanded and existing linkages have been enhanced. The NBS cannot achieve its goal without broad collaboration with public and private agencies and institutions.

In particular, NBS recognizes both the legal and management responsibilities of states for many species, the strong commitment to resource conservation by states, and the scientific expertise and rich information resources held by states.

NBS has established a State Partnership Program to help build state capabilities for information collection



Bombay Hook, Northwest Region.

and management, initiated several projects with major private timber firms, established close ties with state-run Natural Heritage Programs, and initiated joint projects with the natural history museum community.

A national electronic network for increasing access to biological information is being developed. This network will provide access to and information about biological data held by a wide variety of partners.

Advantages for Bird-Watchers, Hunters, and Anglers: Barely a year old, the NBS has already proven its worth for migratory bird and waterfowl management and for fisheries management.

NBS produces benefits to migratory bird and waterfowl management:

- By providing key research and information management for waterfowl regulation across state and international boundaries. The annual recreation harvest of waterfowl is a significant economic and political issue that demands unbiased scientific information available to all governments and people who have mutual interest in wise stewardship of waterfowl populations.
- By measuring the population trends of many bird species in the United States, Canada, and northern Mexico through the Breeding Bird Survey, a cooperative nationwide effort.
- By responding through the NBS Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin, to determine the cause of an unexpected die-off of bald eagles discovered in recent months.

- By working with government and industry scientists to understand how to restore southern forested wetlands, which are critical for many migratory birds.

NBS provides benefits to fisheries management:

- By researching control methods for sea lamprey, a predator of lake trout and salmon, both valuable to Great Lakes fisheries.
- By providing information on fish contaminants and water quality in South Florida/Everglades to help restore the once-abundant fisheries in Florida Bay.
- By supporting recreational and commercial hatchery operations from the Chesapeake watershed to the Pacific Northwest. NBS operates the only labs that can provide FDA approved data in support of new drugs for use in hatchery management.
- By using DNA science to save fish worth more than \$500,000 to the commercial and sports fishing industry.

Strengthening the Scientific Basis for Implementing Environmental Laws: The



Preparing to administer anesthetic to black-footed ferret.



Catching a sandhill crane.

thorough, impartial and timely science of NBS will result in identifying problems early and hopefully solving them while options and alternatives are plentiful, thereby reducing the number of species that

must be added to the Endangered Species list. Up-front information dealing with integrated regional issues, rather than single species or jurisdictions, is essential to the prevention of "train wrecks" -- situations where environmental problems go unnoticed, or unaddressed, until both ecological and economic disruption is all but inevitable.

The integration of the Department's biological science expertise in a single, non-regulatory agency has enabled NBS scientists to provide objective input to complex debates, without raising questions of motive or influence. The NBS, as an integrated biological science bureau, will also work to meet the many research needs -- both common and diverse -- of Interior bureaus, states, other Federal agencies, and individuals interested in the biological diversity of the Nation's fish and wildlife. For example, additional data can lead to recognition of larger populations, thus avoiding unnecessary conflicts. This occurred with the Nevada Blue Butterfly, a listed species, allowing fewer restrictions on off-road vehicles. Had additional information on the distribution of the snail darter been available at the time, the Tellico Dam controversy could have been avoided.

Even if species are listed, the goal of NBS is information that is useful for developing management solutions that accommodate both landowners and the needs of the species.

NBS AND ASSOCIATION OF SYSTEMATICS COLLECTIONS SIGN AGREEMENT

On February 24, 1994, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Association of Systematics Collections (ASC) to provide a framework for future cooperative activities with the National Biological Service (NBS).

"This cooperative agreement is a milestone -- bringing the substantial resources of our Nation's museums and botanical gardens into partnership with the National Biological Service," Babbitt said. "The support of these scientists and their collective information on America's biological resources will be tremendously helpful to the NBS."

President of ASC Phillip Humphrey said, "This agreement recognizes the shared goals of the NBS and the Nation's natural history institutions. We are pleased that our biological collections throughout the country can provide reliable data, scientific expertise, and, through our exhibits and public programs, can serve as windows on biological survey activities for the American people."

ASC is an international not-for-profit organization devoted to the support of institutions housing biological collections used in research. ASC represents freestanding museums, botanic gardens, universities, state museums, state biological surveys, and federal and state agencies housing collections. They promote the use of collections resources for the betterment of society. The ASC passed a resolution in 1982 in support of the concept of a national biological survey/service.