

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Federal role in fish and wildlife management was first recognized in 1871 with the establishment of the Bureau of Fisheries. In the 1970s, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife became today's Fish and Wildlife Service. The changes in management and organization over the years demonstrate the evolving, yet continuing need for Federal programs to protect fish and wildlife resources.

Today, the Service manages 509 national wildlife refuges, 50 coordination areas, and 37 wetlands management districts with water fowl production areas for a land mass totaling more than 92 million acres. It also manages 72 fish hatcheries and 61 Fishery Resources Offices throughout the country, and is responsible for migratory bird management, endangered species protection, law enforcement and for consultations on water resource development projects.

### Endangered Species Act Successes

The Endangered Species Act, recognized as the single most comprehensive environmental legislation ever enacted by Congress, requires the conservation of threatened and endangered species and the ecosystems upon which they depend.

At the end of 1996, 51 of the 91 U.S. birds classified as endangered or threatened are either stable or increasing in number. The American bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and brown pelican are examples of birds that are well on their way to recovery, while the California condor and the whooping crane are encouraging examples of how species can be rescued from the brink of extinction.

*"The Fish and Wildlife Service has been increasing its engagement with the world beyond the refuge boundary. We must be willing to work cooperatively with others to conserve wildlife habitat within the American landscape. Private citizens, conservation groups, State and local governments and other Federal agencies all have important roles to play if we are to truly protect the ecosystems we share with wildlife, and on which we, ourselves, depend."*

Significant progress was achieved by the Service in working with partners to conserve species before they need the protection of the Act, determining the species that need protection (listing), and restoring listed species to a secured existence (recovery).

### Establishing New Refuge Management Principles and Public Use Priorities

The value of the Refuge System to the Nation was highlighted through President Clinton's issuance of Executive Order 12996 in March 1996. It affirmed four principles:

**I. Habitat** - Fish and wildlife will not prosper without high-quality habitat, and without fish and wildlife, traditional uses of refuges cannot be sustained. The

Refuge System will continue to conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of fish and wildlife habitats within refuges.

**II. Public Use** - The Refuge System provides important opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities involving

hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

**III. Partnerships** - America's sportsmen and women were the first partners who insisted on protecting valuable wildlife habitat within wildlife refuges. Conservation partnerships with other Federal agencies, State agencies, tribes, organizations, industry, and the general public can make contributions to the growth and management of the Refuge System.

**IV. Public Involvement** - The public should be given a full and open opportunity to participate in decisions regarding acquisitions and management of our national wildlife refuges.

To begin implementation of the Order, the Service conducted a workshop with 34 nongovernmental organizations. Preservation of wildlife and habitat was established as the top priority. In addition, a Friends



*Neo-tropical bird research (photo by J. and K. Hollingsworth).*

Initiative was launched in cooperation with several environmental organizations. On behalf of the initiative, the Service and the National Wildlife Refuge Association will publish a directory of sponsoring refuges, cooperating associations and Friends Groups, and identify Refuge System units with high potential for a successful Friends Group.

## Enhancing the National Wildlife Refuge System

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the Nation's only system of lands designated specifically for conservation and management of fish and wildlife. Three new national wildlife refuges were officially added to the National Wildlife Refuge System, bringing the total number of refuges to 509. The San Diego, California; Mandalay, Louisiana; and Rappahannock River Valley, Virginia refuges are now part of a system that has protected our Nation's rich and diverse wildlife and wildlife habitat since 1903.

The number of Refuge systems and acreage are indicators of the contribution of refuges to preserving natural diversity on refuge lands. The Refuge System includes over 92 million acres in 509 National Wildlife Refuges, over 317 thousand acres in 50 Coordination Areas, and over 2 million acres in 186 counties with Waterfowl Production Areas. In addition, of the 965 species listed under the Endangered Species Act, 232 or 24 percent occur and/or have habitat on national wildlife refuges. Of these, approximately 55 percent are improving or stable, reflecting the quality habitat protection provided by refuges for the implementation of recovery plans.

In 1996, there were over 29 million visitors to wildlife refuges. However, the scale and range of this interaction with the public cannot be captured solely by the number of visitors since it includes such diverse activities as educational outreach, television specials, various forms of wildlife-dependent recreation and newspaper and magazine articles. In addition, hunting, fishing, camping, picnicking, nature tours and other recreational programs are in growing demand by the public.

## Conserving Vital Habitat

Stewardship of habitat vital to the Nations' fish and wildlife is a time honored responsibility of the Fish and Wildlife Service. It includes conservation, protection, restoration, and enhancement actions beneficial to important habitat resources in partnership with public, governmental, and private entities. The Fish and Wildlife Service promotes the conservation of habitat by:

- providing expert ecological consultation advice including early recommendations to minimize and offset unavoidable habitat losses;

### FWS Biologists Honored

*A group of FWS biologists involved with the Partners for Wildlife Program in Montana were honored by the Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society.*

*Jim Stutzman, Greg Neudecker, Gary Sullivan, Randy Gazda, Dean Vaughan, and Tim Tiplady, all of whom work at various field offices in Montana, were recognized with the Society's Group Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Protection and Enhancement of Fisheries Resources.*

*Under the group's Blackfoot Initiative, 13,000 acres have been protected through conservation easements; 1,700 acres of wetlands have been enhanced, restored, or created; and 1,300 acres of native prairie have been restored. These efforts also have restored or enhanced stream habitat on nearly 200 miles of Blackfoot River tributaries. In the Centennial Valley and the Big Hold drainage, the Partners for Wildlife program has fenced several miles of riparian zones and drilled wells for stock watering to help reduce stream withdrawals at critical times of the year.*

*Awards committee chair Buddy Drake said that the Partners program has "...established a working relationship with landowners that is unprecedented for those regions. Your work has helped foster not only good resource stewardship but also goodwill throughout Montana."*

- establishing partnerships to restore coastal ecosystem habitats which have restored over 10,000 acres of habitat, protected another 30,000 acres, and awarded \$24 million in grant funds to enable State partners to protect 37,000 acres of coastal habitats nationwide;
- inventorying the Nation's wetlands by providing maps and digital data, as well as updated analyses of the entire country in a timely manner for public and private sector users; and
- conveying to the public easily understandable and scientifically credible information about habitats, and our recommended solutions to often complex natural resources issues that affect the well being of fish and wildlife, and people.

## Restoring Depleted Fisheries

Many of the Nation's significant fisheries have been depleted by over-fishing, pollution, habitat loss, and damage. To reverse these conditions, the Service must develop effective strategies for conserving, restoring, enhancing, and managing the Nation's fishery resources and aquatic systems for the benefit of future generations. The Service is focusing on rebuilding critical fish stocks and aquatic habitats through strong government and private sector partnerships, providing scientific management and technology development to foster successful fishery resources management, providing recreational fishing opportunities and reaching outward to heighten environmental awareness and inform and involve the public in support of responsible fishery stewardship.

The stewardship of fishery resources has been a core responsibility of the Fish and Wildlife Service for over 120 years. Recreational angling in the United States provides nearly \$70 billion in economic output, 1 million jobs, \$2.1 billion in Federal income taxes, \$1.1 billion in State sales taxes, \$227 million in State income taxes and about \$200 million in excise taxes to create new fishing opportunities.

The Fisheries Program was actively involved in several multi-agency programs to restore anadromous fish stocks along the Pacific, Gulf, and Atlantic coasts. These efforts included improvements to fish passage facilities, implementation of fishery management plans, and production of 58 million Pacific salmon and steelhead trout, 9 million Atlantic salmon, and 7 million Atlantic



First big cutthroat (photo by R. Baldes).

and Gulf-stripped bass. Non-anadromous fish restoration efforts focused on providing technical assistance in the recovery efforts of threatened and endangered species, restoration and enhancement of interjurisdictional waters, meeting trust responsibilities on tribal lands, mitigation of the impacts of Federal water development projects, and the prevention and control of aquatic nuisance species. These efforts were supported by the production of 65 million warm and coolwater species, 15 million inland salmonoids, 7 million lake trout for the Great Lakes restoration effort, and production of 1 million threatened and endangered fish species.

During 1996, the Service led the implementation of President Clinton's Executive Order 12962 on Recreation Fisheries. The Order:

- requires Federal agencies to strengthen efforts to improve the quality of streams, rivers, and lakes supporting recreational fisheries;
- establishes a National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council consisting of seven Federal agencies;
- charges the Council with developing a comprehensive Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan; and
- calls for a new policy to promote compatibility between the protection of endangered species and recreational fisheries.

The Conservation Plan was completed in June and was highlighted by Secretary Babbitt at National Fishing Week events in Washington, D.C. National Fishing Week was a celebrated event at National Fish Hatcheries and Fishery Resource Offices. Over 6,000 children and

adults attended fishing clinics, demonstrations, and environmental education sessions at Fish and Wildlife Service facilities during National Fishing Week held this past June. Fisheries Across America is a program focused on aquatic ecosystem restoration and is implemented through a partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and non-Federal entities. Over 29 projects were implemented in 1996 and included on the ground fish and habitat restoration work that enlisted the help of volunteers, fishing groups, and communities in conserving and restoring local watersheds. Specific projects in 1996 included restoring cutthroat and bull trout populations in Montana, conserving the habitat of the endangered fountain darter in Texas, and restoring the habitat of Cape Cod anadromous herring.

## Customer Service

The Service's Customer Service initiative is an important component of its implementation of the Government Performance and Results Act. Since 1994, Fish and Wildlife Service employees have been challenged to find



Tagging a musk ox (photo by FWS).

new and innovative ways of responding to the needs of customers.

To meet that challenge, several projects were initiated to assess customer needs and improve service including:

- Publishing customer service standards at selected National Wildlife Refuge visitor centers in each of the seven regions.

- Joining with the National Park Service to develop a customer service evaluation card designed for use at refuges and parks across the country, which provided for visitor feedback regarding specific aspects of customer service linked to published standards.

- Conducting pilot testing of the card at two National Wildlife Refuges. At both locations, over 95 percent of customers indicated an overall satisfaction of very good or good (scale - very good, good, average, poor, very poor).

### FWS Efforts Help Community Recover

*The Flood of '96 hit the Northwest with a fury few people had ever witnessed. One of the hardest hit areas in Idaho was Clearwater County where damages were estimated at \$25 million.*

*With three days of non-stop rain and warming temperatures melting the already existing 30 inches of snow, Clearwater County, Idaho was being carried away by mudslides and fast moving waters. Homes and banks along the Orofino Creek could no longer contain the torrent, and the swollen waters moved rapidly downstream toward the town of 2,000 residents. Homes and businesses along the banks and in the town sat smack dab in the middle of the creek's flood plain.*

*At nearby Fish and Wildlife Service Dworshak National Fish Hatchery in northern Idaho, maintenance workers began placing barricades on the deteriorating roadway which had begun to wash away. The Dworshak crew joined the crew from the Clearwater State Fish Hatchery trying to keep the road clear. As water moved through the town of Orofino about 300 FWS employees responded to an emergency call from the Clearwater County Sheriff's Department. The Idaho Fisheries Resource Office, which is part of the Dworshak fisheries complex, was dispatched to help sandbag in town. Hatchery employees also sandbagged streets and homes or helped evacuate people and possessions to higher grounds.*

*Then, as suddenly as it had started, the flooding subsided. Remarkably, no lives were lost and people began the recovery process. FWS employees from the Idaho Fisheries Resource Office were again mobilized to help unload Red Cross Comfort and Clean-Up Kits for the nearly 100 homes suffering flood damage. Other Service employees drove their personal vehicles to help with transportation and delivery of emergency items. The efforts of the FWS employees were noted by the community. Beyond the tan and brown uniforms, the true colors of the FWS employees came shining through.*



*California condor in Los Padres National Park (photo by C. Koford).*

Satisfaction with other specific areas such as trail signs, cleanliness of facilities and quality of informational materials generally ranged from 80 percent to nearly 100 percent.

### **Status of Implementing the Government and Performance Results Act**

The Fish and Wildlife Service is currently developing its formal performance plan under the mandates of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). This plan will be submitted to Congress by September 30, 1997. In the meantime, the Fish and Wildlife Service

is strengthening day-to-day management consistent with GPRA requirements. For example, the National Wildlife Refuge System is implementing a new accomplishment reporting and needs identification system that will link field station accomplishments and needs to outcomes and system-wide goals. Refuge specific project and staffing needs are being ranked so that funding can be directed to the highest priority stations. The Endangered Species program consultations was streamlined and a new user-friendly Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) handbook was published to encourage landowners to participate in the HCP development.