

News Release

National Wildlife Refuge System



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 2, 2006

Southeast National Wildlife Refuge System Reorganizes - Personnel Reductions to Offset Rises in Operational Costs -

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is realigning its workforce to address declining budgets anticipated over the next three years. Nearly 90 positions -- about 10 percent of the refuge workforce -- will be eliminated.

Here in Tennessee, four positions will be eliminated at national wildlife refuges over the next three years, as follows:

<u>National Wildlife Refuge</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Nearest Tennessee City</u>
Cross Creeks NWR	Public Use Park Ranger	Dover
Lower Hatchie NWR	Engineering Equipment Operator	Henning
Reelfoot NWR	Refuge Operations Specialist	Union City
West Tennessee Refuge Complex	Administrative Clerk	Dyersburg

The loss of three wildlife refuge staff positions in Tennessee during the period 2005 to 2006, and four more positions before 2009, will seriously reduce each refuge's ability to properly manage habitat and adequately support visitor services. After the reductions are implemented, Tennessee's 138,220 acres of wildlife refuge lands will be managed by only 39 employees, equating to 3,544 acres of land per employee on refuges that extend from Lake Barkley and Kentucky Lake to Reelfoot Lake and the Mississippi River.

"Due to cutbacks, some services on Tennessee and Cross Creeks Refuges will have to be scaled back," said John Taylor, Refuge Manager at Tennessee Refuge Complex. "The loss of the Park Ranger position by 2009 at Cross Creeks Refuge may result in closure of the Refuge Visitor Center, eliminate the refuge's sponsorship of the annual Earth Camp Event, reduce environmental education activities by 90%, and may eliminate the quota hunts for deer on the refuge."

Randy Cook, Refuge Manager of a complex of five refuges in west Tennessee, said "the three positions (two refuge managers and an engineering equipment operator) abolished in 2005-2006, plus the three additional positions (refuge manager, engineering equipment operator, and administrative clerk) targeted for abolishment by 2009 will have a direct effect on our ability to manage wildlife resources as well as our ability to provide compatible public use opportunities for

the citizens of Tennessee. We simply can't provide the basic biological habitat requirements (food, protection, cover) for thousands of wintering waterfowl and hundreds of bald eagles without refuge managers and engineering equipment operators on these historical refuges in Tennessee. Reductions in the habitat acreages actively managed for migratory birds (farming – moist soil) and cutbacks in our present opportunities for hunting, fishing, environmental education – interpretation, and visitor services appear to be a certainty at this point.”

In recent years, operating budgets have been generally flat. Annual cost of living increases, rising energy and fuel bills, and other costs continue to increase each year. The challenge of continuing to operate in an austere budget environment is particularly pronounced here in the Southeast Region which employs more than 20 percent - 748 employees - of the Service's National Wildlife Refuge System staff. The Service manages 128 national wildlife refuges across the Southeast, more than any other region.

“We have to take a hard look at just exactly what our core priorities really are,” said Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director. “These are tough decisions necessary to help the Service secure its place as one of the country's premiere conservation stewards.”

The effects of these cutbacks will be reduced capabilities spread out over a number of different areas which may include reduction in public access opportunities at some national wildlife refuges and scaling back education and outreach opportunities for educators, students, and instructors, and reductions in some biological monitoring and maintenance programs.

- The Refuge System is focusing efforts on the highest priority, mission-critical actions and locations, and reducing personnel to address the declining budgets.
- 88 positions throughout the Southeast national wildlife refuges will be phased out over a three-year period. Nine positions in the Regional Office and 79 at refuges in the field will be lost.
- Seven refuges will be included in refuge complexes where they will be managed and overseen from a geographically separate refuge complex headquarters office.

Many workers in the abolished positions will be eligible to retire or will voluntarily transfer. Also, if approved, buy-outs and early retirements through Voluntary Early Retirement Authority and Voluntary Separation Incentive Pay may be available to offer eligible employees. Only after all of these options have been exhausted will directed reassignments be considered. There are no plans to request the authority for a Reduction-in-Force (RIF) to reach our target.

For more information, visit: <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/workforce>

Location	Number of Positions Abolished FY05-FY06	Current Number of Positions FY06	Number of Positions To Be Abolished FY07-FY11	Percent Lost Proposed for FY07-FY11
Regional Office*	4	68	8.5	13%
Alabama	3	33	3	9%
Arkansas	5	52	4	8%
Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands	1	27	2	7%
Florida	14	168	21	13%
Georgia	4	72	11	15%
Kentucky	0	4	0	0%
Louisiana	14	104	18	18%
Mississippi	5	67	3	5%
North Carolina	10	73	9	12%
South Carolina	5	37	4	11%
<u>Tennessee</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>43</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>9%</u>
Totals	68	748	87.5	12%

* Positions will be eliminated from Regional Office by the end of FY2008.