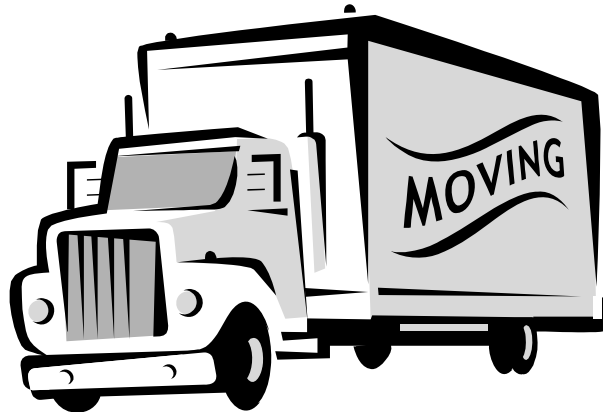


**Employee Mobility in the
National Wildlife Refuge System**

A Survey of Employees



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An internet-based survey of all employees in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) was designed to assess the history of employee relocation, willingness to relocate for future advancement, and factors that affect employees' willingness to relocate. The survey also assessed projected rates of retirement, participation in leadership development programs and the effects of various incentives on employees' willingness to relocate for career advancement.

A total of 1,069 employees responded to the survey, approximately one-third of all NWRS employees. Respondents were representative of NWRS employees with respect to geographic dispersion and gender but employees in higher pay grades (GS-12 and higher) responded at higher rates than those in lower pay grades. Refuge managers, wildlife biologists and other biological scientists responded at higher rates than employees in other occupational series.

Seventy percent of employees said they intended to work the rest of their careers with the NWRS, while 28% were unsure. Women were almost twice as likely as men to be uncertain or to say they would not spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS.

Nineteen percent of NWRS employees plan to retire by 2014 and 43% plan to retire by 2020, i.e., approximately one out of five positions in the NWRS will become vacant in the next 5 years and nearly half will become vacant in the next 10 years. Twenty-four percent of refuge managers plan to retire by 2014. More Washington Office (28%) and regional office (26%) employees plan to retire by 2014 than refuge unit employees (17%).

Fifty-four percent of employees relocated at least once to take a different position within the NWRS since 2000 and 27% relocated two or more times in that period. Eighty percent of employees expressed willingness to relocate at least once to achieve their ultimate career goals and 52% were willing to relocate two or more times to achieve their ultimate career goals.

Only 16% of NWRS employees said they would consider relocating to the Washington Office in the next few years, compared to 35% who said they would consider relocating to a regional office and 68% who said they would consider relocating to another refuge unit. Among the occupational series, wildlife biologists were least willing to consider relocating to a regional office or the Washington Office, while other biological scientists were most willing. Thirty-two percent of employees currently working on refuge units indicated they were willing to consider relocating to a regional office and 13% said they would consider relocating to the Washington Office. Twenty-five percent of regional office employees said they would consider relocating to the Washington Office.

Interest in a promotion, desire to diversify experience, and desire to contribute more to the mission of the NWRS rated higher in importance than all other reasons among those who indicated they would consider relocating in the next few years. Employees who would consider relocating to the Washington Office rated each of those three reasons as very important more frequently than employees who would consider relocating to a regional office. Employees who

would consider relocating to another refuge unit rated those three reasons as very important less frequently than those who would consider relocating to either a regional office or the Washington Office.

Employees who were unsure about relocating or who indicated they would not consider relocating in the next few years rated nearly all of the reasons given for not wanting to relocate as equally important. However, employees who were uncertain or would not consider relocating to a regional office or the Washington Office cited concern for assuming more administrative duties as very important more frequently than employees who were uncertain or would not consider relocating to another refuge unit. The latter group of employees more frequently cited family concerns in their reluctance to relocate (e.g., concern for disruption of a significant other's career, not wanting to move farther away from family or friends, disruption of kids' school/social lives).

Women tended to rate all reasons for relocating as very important more often than men, but especially for desire to diversify experience and desire to relocate to a place that offered more opportunities for a significant other. Employees at the GS-9 level or lower cited interest in a promotion as a very important reason for relocating more often than employees at GS-11 or above.

Women and younger employees rated concern for the disruption of a significant other's career as a very important reason not to relocate more often than men or older employees. Younger employees also rated disruption of kids' school/social lives and concern for the quality of schools at the new location as very important reasons not to relocate more often than older employees.

Financial incentives, such as providing a housing allowance or providing a cash relocation incentive were more likely to greatly increase an employee's willingness to relocate than opportunities to get back to the field. Financial incentives were particularly important to increasing the willingness of employees to relocate to the Washington Office. All of the listed incentives were more important to employees who aspired to positions in the Washington Office than they were to employees who aspired to positions in regional offices or refuge units. Employees who cited family concerns as important reasons not to relocate were less likely than those with financial concerns to say that any of the incentives described in the survey would greatly increase their willingness to relocate.

Overall, employees more often felt that establishing additional regional and national leadership positions at locations outside of major urban areas would be very effective in improving and encouraging NWRS leadership development than offering short-term or long-term detail positions. Women and employees with less than 10 years of service with the NWRS were more likely than other employees to say that short-term detail assignments would be somewhat or very effective in improving and encouraging leadership development.

The survey results identify numerous challenges and opportunities, as well as some potential strategies, for the NWRS leadership to consider. It is encouraging to note that 80% of NWRS employees are willing to relocate at least once to achieve their ultimate career goals and

more than half of them are willing to relocate two or more times. Although only 16% of employees said they would consider relocating to the Washington Office in the next few years, and 35% said they would consider relocating to a regional office, that still means that about 500 NWRS employees would consider relocating to the Washington Office and approximately 1,000 would consider relocating to a regional office. Another 20% of employees (600) were uncertain about relocating to the Washington Office and 25% (750) were uncertain about relocating to regional offices. Those are substantial pools of talent from which to recruit future leaders.

The survey results suggest that announcements of leadership positions should appeal to opportunities for advancement, diversification of experience and ability to contribute significantly to achievement of the NWRS mission. If those appeals are combined with financial incentives for relocation, especially providing a housing allowance or a cash relocation incentive, the NWRS should be able to persuade more employees to consider advancement and relocation.

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INTRODUCTION

In the first quarter of the 21st century, natural resource agencies face a perfect storm of personnel issues. Multiple fronts of massive retirements, smaller recruitment pools for entry-level positions, and reluctance of existing agency personnel to relocate and advance into positions of leadership in agencies could lead to a critical shortage of leaders and managers. To prepare for these colliding fronts of personnel issues, natural resource agencies have begun to engage in workforce planning, the practice of purposeful plans for transitioning between generations of agency personnel.

Members of the Baby Boomer generation, the children born between the end of World War II and the early 1960s, will retire in great numbers in the early 21st century. Natural resource agencies will feel the effects of those retirements even more than most other organizations because most agencies increased their workforces substantially during the “Environmental Decade” of the 1970s. Those employees now have 30 or more years of service and are eligible for pensions.

The second front in the perfect storm of personnel issues consists of smaller recruitment pools for agencies hiring new entry-level personnel. Most university natural resource programs in the United States have experienced declining enrollments since the mid-1990s. In addition to declining enrollments, the type of students enrolled in university natural resource programs has changed significantly. Many of today’s students belong to the “Animal Planet Generation,” students who grew up learning about wildlife by watching television programs rather than learning by first-hand experience through hunting and fishing. Compared to previous generations of students, fewer of today’s students have their sights set on a career with a management-oriented natural resource agency (McMullin et al. 2009).

The final converging front in the perfect storm of personnel issues is the reluctance of existing agency employees to relocate and advance to positions of leadership in agencies. A study of state fish and wildlife agency personnel found that only about one in four employees was interested in moving up in the agency and willing to relocate to the state headquarters to do so (McMullin 2004). The perfect storm of personnel issues then, consists of a mass exodus of retiring employees, combined with a dearth of qualified new recruits and a reluctant remaining few to fill vacated positions of leadership.

This report addresses one aspect of the perfect storm of personnel issues in the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: the willingness of employees to relocate for the purpose of career advancement. The report summarizes the findings of a survey of employees of the NWRS. The survey documented the history of relocation by employees, their willingness to relocate to achieve career goals, the reasons why they would be willing to relocate (or not), and the estimated effects of various incentives on employees’ willingness to relocate.

METHODS

The contractor developed the survey with input from NWRS Leadership Team members on successive drafts throughout the spring, 2009. The original focus on leadership and mobility within the NWRS was narrowed to focus more specifically on issues of mobility. We chose to conduct the survey via the internet because all NWRS employees had ready access to the internet, the cost of an internet-based survey was substantially less than a mail survey, and the time required for implementation was considerably shorter for an internet-based survey.

All employees of the NWRS were invited to participate in an on-line survey on July 10, 2009 via an email message from the Chief of the NWRS. One follow-up reminder email was sent to all employees on July 20, 2009 and the survey closed for data collection on August 13, 2009. Standard survey protocol called for one or two more reminders, but NWRS leaders were concerned about sending too many emails to employees and opted for only one reminder. Although several hundred more responses would likely have been generated by additional follow-up reminders, the number of respondents was adequate for all analyses and comparison to demographic characteristics of the whole NWRS personnel population suggested that respondents were fairly representative of the whole population. Data were downloaded to an SPSS file for analyses.

RESULTS

Response Rate

- 1,069 NWRS employees responded to the survey. This represents approximately one-third of NWRS employees, however, the exact response rate was not determined because the contractor did not know the total number of employees.
- Responses by region ranged from 80 in the Pacific Southwest (R8) to 178 in the Midwest (R3; Table 1). The 49 responses listed as system missing in Table 1 include 39 respondents from the Washington Office.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

- Respondents averaged 13 years of service with the NWRS, with 38% of employees serving less than 10 years, 38% between 10 and 19 years, and 23% serving 20 or more years (Table 2).
- 18% of NWRS employees had not worked for any other employers and another 40% had worked for only 1 or 2 other employers (Table 3).
- 70% of employees said they intended to work the rest of their careers for the NWRS, while 28% were unsure (Table 4).
- 19% of NWRS employees plan to retire by 2014 and 43% plan to retire by 2020 (Table 5).
- NWRS employees responding to the survey averaged 45 years of age (median = 46) and ranged from 19 to 68 years of age (Table 6). 38% of employees were 50 or older, while only 27% were under 40.
- 63% of respondents were men, 37% were women.
- 62% of respondents were in the fish and wildlife administrator/refuge manager, wildlife biologist or other biological scientist occupational series (Table 7).
- 27% of respondents were at the GS-9 level or less, 44% were GS-11 or GS-12, and 28% were at GS-13 or higher (Table 8).
- 81% of respondents worked on refuge units, 15% worked in regional offices and 4% worked in the Washington Office (Table 9).
- Comparison of demographic characteristics of respondents to NWRS statistics indicates that respondents were representative of all employees with respect to geographic dispersion and gender. However, respondents in higher grade levels (GS-12 and higher) responded at higher rates than those in lower grade levels. Refuge managers, wildlife

biologists and other biological scientists responded at higher rates than employees in other occupational series.

Relocation History and Reasons for Relocation

- 54% of employees relocated to take a different position within the NWRS at least once since 2000 and 27% relocated two or more times (Table 10). 51% of employees relocated at least once between 1990 and 1999 and 26% relocated two or more times during that period (Table 11).
- Employees who relocated since 2000 cited a desire to diversify their experience (31% very important; Table 12), desire for a promotion (26% very important; Table 13), and desire to contribute more to the mission of the NWRS (24% very important; Table 14) as very important reasons in their decisions to relocate more frequently than all other reasons. Relocating to an area with a lower cost of living was least important to employees (Tables 15-20).
- 45% of refuge managers relocated 2 or more times since 2000, significantly more than employees in other occupational series (Table 21). General maintenance employees (76%) and general administration employees (67%) relocated less frequently since 2000 than employees in other occupational series.
- More employees who intended to spend the rest of their careers in the NWRS (31%) than employees who were uncertain about the rest of their careers (19%) relocated 2 or more times since 2000 (Table 22).
- 71% of employees who had participated in the Stepping Up to Leadership (SUTL) Program relocated at least once since 2000, compared to 52% of employees who had not participated in the program (Table 23).
- 76% of employees who had participated in the Advanced Leadership Development Program (ALDP) relocated at least once since 2000, compared to 53% of employees who had not participated in the program (Table 24).
- Frequency of relocation since 2000 did not differ significantly between men (57% relocating one or more times since 2000) and women (50% relocating one or more times since 2000; Table 25) or among regions (ranging between 44% and 62% of employees who had relocated one or more times since 2000; Table 26).

Willingness to Relocate to Achieve Career Goals

- 80% of respondents indicated they were willing to relocate at least once to achieve their ultimate career goal, and 52% were willing to relocate two or more times to achieve their ultimate career goal (Table 27).

- Employees who were uncertain about spending the rest of their careers with the NWRS were more likely to say they would relocate two or more times to achieve their ultimate career goals (60%) than those who intended to spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS (47%; Table 28).
- Employees at GS-11 and GS-12 levels (both 83%) were more likely than employees at other grades to indicate they would be willing to relocate at least once to achieve their ultimate career goals (Table 29).
- 95% of employees who indicated they hoped to work at the Washington Office level some day were willing to relocate at least once to achieve their ultimate career goals, compared to 88% of employees who aspired to a Regional Office position and 72% of employees who desired to stay at the Refuge level (Table 30).
- Wildlife biologists (84%) and refuge managers (82%) were slightly more likely to express a willingness to relocate to achieve their ultimate career goals than employees in other occupational series (Table 31).
- Employees who plan to retire in 2021 or later were more likely to express willingness to relocate to achieve their ultimate career goals (82% to 90%) than employees who plan to retire prior to 2021 (42% to 77%), except for the group of employees who plan to retire between 2015 and 2017 (85%; Table 32). This anomaly could reflect a desire among these employees to relocate one or two more times (71% of respondents in this retirement cohort) to improve their retirement benefits.
- Willingness to relocate to achieve an ultimate career goal did not differ between men and women (Table 33), regions (Table 34), or between employees who participated or did not participate in SUTL or ALDP programs (Tables 35 and 36).
- Although employees more often gave a rating of 4 or 5 on the importance scale to diversifying experience (76%), contributing to the NWRS mission (66%), and desire for a promotion (61%) as reasons for previous relocations, more than 80% of employees who rated any reason 4 or 5 on the importance scale indicated that they were willing to relocate at least once to achieve their ultimate career goal (Tables 37 through 45).

Interest in Relocating to a Different Refuge, a Regional Office or the Washington Office

- 68% of respondents indicated they would consider relocating to another refuge in the next few years (Table 46). 35% of respondents said they would consider relocating to a regional office (Table 47) and 16% said they would consider relocating to the Washington Office (Table 48).
- Respondents who said they intended to spend their entire careers in the NWRS were more likely to say they would not consider relocating to another refuge (Table 49), a regional office (Table 50), or the Washington Office (Table 51).

- 65% to 78% of employees who intended to retire in 2015 or later said they would consider relocating to another refuge within the next few years, compared to 32% of those who intended to retire in 2009-2011 and 48% of those who intended to retire in 2012-2014 (Table 52). Only 11% of employees who intended to retire in 2009-2011 said they would consider relocating to a regional office, compared to 29% to 48% of employees in those retirement cohorts from 2012 through 2026 and later (Table 53). A similar pattern emerged among those who would consider relocating to the Washington Office, with only 8% of those who intended to retire in 2009-2011 answering yes, compared to 13% to 21% of those in other retirement cohorts (Table 54).
- The percentage of employees who would consider relocating to another refuge decreased from 92% of those less than 30 years of age to 43% of those 60 or older (Table 55). Approximately one-half as many employees in each age group would consider relocating to a regional office (44% among the youngest employees, 26% among the oldest employees; Table 56) and employees in all age groups showed little difference and no consistent pattern in willingness to consider relocating to the Washington Office (14% to 21%; Table 57).
- Biological scientists other than wildlife biologists demonstrated greater willingness to consider relocating to either a regional office (47%) or the Washington Office (23%) than employees in other occupational series (Tables 58 and 59). Wildlife biologists were least willing to consider relocating to regional offices or the Washington Office. Willingness to consider relocating to another refuge showed little variation across occupational series (Table 60).
- 72% to 90% of employees at GS-4 through GS-8 levels were willing to consider relocating to another refuge, compared to 53% (GS-14) to 70% (GS-11) of employees at higher grade levels (Table 61). Grade level had little effect on willingness to consider relocating to a regional office, with 32% to 39% of employees at GS-9 and above answering yes (Table 62). GS-13 (19%) and GS-14 (34%) employees were more likely (although not greatly so) to consider relocating to the Washington Office than employees at lower grades (Table 63).
- 70% of employees currently working on a refuge unit indicated they were willing to consider relocating to another refuge (Table 64), while only 32% said they would consider relocating to a regional office (Table 65) and 13% said they would consider relocating to the Washington Office (Table 66). 59% of regional office employees would consider relocating to a refuge unit; 49% said they would consider relocating to a (presumably other) regional office, and 25% said they would consider relocating to the Washington Office.
- Employees who identified the Washington Office as the highest level at which they hoped to work consistently showed more willingness to consider relocating to any location (Tables 67-69).
- Gender and Region had little effect on willingness to consider relocation to any locations.

Reasons Why Employees Would or Would Not be Willing to Relocate

- Interest in a promotion, desire to diversify experience and desire to contribute more to the mission of the NWRS rated higher in importance than all other reasons among those employees who indicated they would consider relocating in the next few years. Responses of employees who would consider relocating to the Washington Office are found in Tables 70-78. Responses of employees who would consider relocating to a regional office are found in Tables 79-87. Responses of employees who would consider relocating to another refuge unit are found in Tables 88-96.
- Employees who indicated they would consider relocating to the Washington Office were more likely to rate all three of these reasons as very important (62-64%; Tables 70-72) than employees who would consider relocating to a regional office (54-58%; Tables 79-81). Employees who would consider relocating to another refuge unit rated all three reasons as very important less frequently (47-49%; Tables 88-90) than those who would consider relocating to either a regional or the Washington Office.
- A majority of employees who said they were uncertain or would not consider relocating to the Washington Office gave importance ratings of 4 or 5 to all but one of the 10 reasons listed for not relocating (concern for the availability of amenities), and all 9 of those reasons were about equally important in their decisions (53-62% rated 4 or 5 in importance; Tables 97-106).
- Employees who said they were uncertain or would not consider relocating to a regional office responded similarly to those who were dubious about relocating to Washington, with 9 out of 10 reasons receiving majority importance ratings of 4 or 5 (52-63%; Tables 107-116). Again, concern for lack of amenities was the only reason cited as less important in their decisions.
- Employees who said they were unsure or would not consider relocating to another refuge unit showed greater variation in their reasons for not wanting to relocate, with only 4 out of 10 reasons receiving a majority of importance ratings of 4 or 5 (54-72%; Tables 117-126).
- Unlike the employees who were dubious about relocating to a regional office or the Washington Office, for whom concern about assuming more administrative duties topped the list of reasons not to relocate, family concerns tended to be more important for employees who were uncertain or would not consider relocating to another refuge unit. Concern for disruption of a significant other's career topped the list (72% rated 4 or 5 in importance), followed by not wanting to move farther away from family or friends (68%), and disruption of kids' school/social lives (62%).
- Cross-tabulations of reasons for relocation with application to or participation in leadership development programs yielded only two significant interactions. 60% of employees who had applied to the ALDP program rated contributing to the mission of the NWRS as very important, compared to 45% of those who had not applied (Table 127).

57% of employees who had applied to the SUTL program rated diversification of experience as very important, compared to 45% of those who had not applied (Table 128). Interestingly, employees who rated interest in a promotion as very important did not differ significantly in rates of application or participation in either leadership development program (Tables 129-132).

- Employees who had worked for the NWRS less than 10 years tended to rate all of the reasons for relocating except contributing more to the mission of NWRS as very important more frequently than employees who had worked for the NWRS longer (Tables 133-141).
- Employees who intended to spend the rest of their careers with NWRS and those who were uncertain about the rest of their careers showed little difference in their perceptions of importance of reasons for relocating, except for contributing more to the mission of NWRS, which career employees rated as very important more frequently (51% to 38%; Tables 142-150).
- Not surprisingly, employees who projected their retirement dates after 2017 rated the importance of diversifying their experience as a very important reason for relocating more frequently than those who intended to retire in 2017 or earlier. Employees with later projected retirement dates rated family-related reasons for relocating as very important more frequently than those with earlier projected retirement dates (Tables 151-159).
- Employees in younger age groupings tended to rate nearly all reasons for relocating as very important more frequently than older employees (except for contributing to the NWRS mission and cost of living; Tables 160-168). The differences were most prominent with respect to family-related reasons for relocating.
- Women tended to rate reasons for relocating as very important more frequently than men, with particularly significant differences in desire to diversify experience (55% for women, 42% for men) and opportunities for a significant other (44% for women, 31% for men; Tables 169-177).
- Two reasons for relocating generated especially significant results for employees at different GS levels: desire for a promotion and opportunities for a significant other (Tables 178-186). 63% or more of employees at GS-9 or less rated desire for a promotion as a very important reason to relocate, compared to 46% or less of employees at GS-11 or higher. Between 44% and 67% of employees in GS 5-11 levels rated opportunities for a significant other as very important, compared to 31% or less of employees at GS-12 or higher.
- Employees who aspired to work in the Washington Office rated desire for a promotion, diversifying experience and contribution to the NWRS mission as very important reasons to relocate far more frequently than employees who aspired to work in a regional office (and both groups rated those reasons as very important more frequently than employees

who did not wish to work at a level above a refuge unit). On all other reasons for relocating, employees did not differ in perception of importance (Tables 187-195).

- Ratings of the importance of reasons for relocating showed little variation with respect to Occupational Series (Tables 196-204), whether employees worked on a refuge, in a regional office or the Washington Office (Tables 205-213), or by region (214-222).
- Gender, age and retirement date yielded the most significant differences in ratings of importance of reasons not to relocate. Women rated disruption of a significant other's career as very important far more frequently than men did (59% to 35%; Table 223). Younger employees rated disruption of a significant other's career, disruption of kids' school/social lives and concern for quality of schools as very important more frequently than older employees (Tables 224-226). Employees who plan to retire in 2026 or later rated disruption of kids' school/social lives and quality of schools as very important more frequently than employees who planned to retire sooner (Tables 227-228).
- Employees from the Midwest Region (R3) tended to rate most reasons for not relocating as very important more frequently than employees from other regions (Tables 229-238). All other demographic cross-tabulations with reasons not to relocate yielded only minor differences (data not presented).

Incentives for Relocation

- Financial incentives (providing a housing allowance, 53%, or providing a cash relocation incentive, 52%) were more likely than other incentives to greatly increase employees' willingness to relocate to any other location. Other incentives had substantially less effect on employees' willingness to relocate, although 45% of employees said that agency assistance in finding a job for a significant other would greatly increase their willingness to relocate for advancement.
- Although only 16% of all employees said they were willing to consider relocating to the Washington Office and 21% were uncertain, 72% of employees who previously said they were willing to consider relocating to the Washington Office also said a housing allowance would greatly increase their willingness to relocate, and 68% of them also said providing a cash relocation incentive would greatly increase their willingness to relocate. Even among those who were uncertain, 59% said a housing allowance and 61% said a cash relocation incentive would greatly increase their willingness to relocate. All other incentives had substantially less effect on willingness to relocate (Tables 239-245).
- Agency assistance in finding a job for a significant other had a greater effect on those who were uncertain about relocating to the Washington Office (54% greatly increase) than those who were willing to consider relocating there (41% greatly increase).
- Employees responded similarly with regard to incentives and willingness to relocate to regional offices (Tables 246-252) and to other refuge units (Tables 253-259). In both cases, providing a housing allowance or a cash relocation incentive had the greatest effect

on increasing willingness to relocate. Allowing employees to take an annual 2-week, back-to-the-field detail had the smallest effect on willingness to relocate to all three locations.

- Employees who rated any of the reasons for relocating as very important showed little variation in percentage who felt that any of the incentives for relocation would greatly increase their willingness to relocate (data not displayed).
- Approximately 50% or more of employees who rated financial concerns (difficulty selling a home, loss of value when selling a home, increased cost of living) as very important reasons for not relocating said that their willingness to relocate would be greatly increased by financial incentives (providing housing, providing a housing allowance, providing a cash relocation incentive; Tables 260-280).
- Employees who rated family concerns (moving farther from family or friends, disruption of significant other's career, disruption of kids' school/social lives, quality of schools), concern for lack of amenities, concern for loss of recreational opportunities, or concern for increasing administrative duties as very important were less likely than those with financial concerns to say that their willingness to relocate would be greatly increased by any of the incentives. The only exception was that 60% of employees who were concerned about disruption of a significant other's career said that agency assistance in finding a job for their significant other would greatly increase their willingness to relocate (Tables 281-329).
- Financial incentives (providing a housing allowance, providing a cash relocation incentive) more frequently resulted in greatly increased willingness to relocate than any other incentive regardless of how long employees had worked for the NWRS. Employees with less than 10 years with NWRS were more likely to indicate that any of the incentives would greatly increase their willingness to relocate than employees with longer tenure (Tables 330-336).
- Younger employees said that all incentives would greatly increase their willingness to relocate more frequently than older employees (Tables 337-343).
- Financial incentives were more likely to greatly increase the willingness of employees in lower grades to relocate than those in higher grades (above GS-9). Providing housing was especially important to the willingness of the lowest grade employees (GS-4 and GS-5) to relocate (Tables 344-350).
- All incentives were more important to increasing the willingness of employees who aspired to positions in the Washington Office than to employees who aspired to positions in regional offices or refuge units (Tables 351-357). However, providing a housing allowance or a cash relocation incentive were especially important to employees who hoped to someday work in the Washington Office (71% and 72% greatly increase, respectively).

- Other demographic cross-tabulations with incentives produced only occasional significant results, the most notable of which was that 57% of women said that agency assistance in finding a job for a significant other would greatly increase their willingness to relocate, compared to 39% of men (Table 358).

Expanding Leadership Development Opportunities

- Overall, employees more often felt that establishing additional regional and national leadership positions at locations outside of major urban areas would be very effective (45%) in improving and encouraging NWRS leadership development than offering short-term (35%) or long-term (27%) detail positions (Tables 359-361).
- Employees who were willing to relocate at least once to achieve their ultimate career goals more frequently identified long-term detail assignments or decentralizing leadership positions as very effective strategies for improving and encouraging NWRS leadership development than they did short-term detail assignments (Tables 362-364). More than 50% of employees who were willing to relocate 4 or 5 times to achieve career goals felt that long-term detail assignments would be very effective, compared to 23-29% of employees who were willing to relocate 1-3 times and 15% of employees who were unwilling to relocate.
- Participation in or applying to leadership development programs had little effect on employees' perception of the effectiveness of alternative leadership development opportunities. However, employees who either participated in or applied to the ALDP program were more likely than those who had not to say that long-term detail assignments would be very effective in improving and encouraging NWRS leadership development (Tables 365-366). Employees who either participated in or applied to the SUTL program were slightly more likely than those who had not to say that decentralizing leadership development opportunities would be very effective or somewhat effective (Tables 367-368).
- Although approximately 80% of all employees felt that short-term detail assignments would be somewhat or very effective in improving and encouraging NWRS leadership development, employees with less than 10 years in the NWRS (42%) were more likely to say that they would be very effective than employees with 10-19 years of service (35%) or those with 20 or more years of service (23%; Table 369). About two-thirds of all employees felt that long-term detail assignments would be somewhat or very effective, but again, employees with less than 10 years service (45%) were more likely to say they would be very effective than employees with 10-19 years of service (37%) and those with 20 or more years of service (18%; Table 370). Approximately 80% or more of employees felt that decentralizing leadership development opportunities would be somewhat or very effective. Forty-nine percent of employees in both the under 10 years and 10-19 years categories felt that decentralizing would be very effective, compared to only 33% of employees with 20 or more years of service (Table 371).

- Women felt that short-term details would be very effective in improving and encouraging NWRS leadership development more often than men (42% vs. 31%). Men and women did not differ in their views of the effectiveness of long-term detail assignments or decentralizing leadership development opportunities (Tables 372-374).
- Employees in various occupational series fell into two categories with regard to effectiveness of short-term detail assignments. Between 42 and 50% of recreation planners/park rangers (non-law enforcement), general administration, other biological scientists, and general maintenance employees felt that short-term detail assignments would be very effective in improving and encouraging leadership development (Table 375). In contrast, only 27-31% of refuge managers, wildlife biologists and law enforcement park rangers felt short-term detail assignments would be very effective. Employees in the various occupational series did not differ significantly in their view of the effectiveness of long-term detail assignments or decentralization of leadership development opportunities (Tables 376-377).
- Employees in different GS grade levels held significantly different (but not dramatically different) views of the effectiveness of leadership development opportunities. Between 40 and 52% of employees at GS levels 7 to 11 felt that short-term detail assignments would be very effective in improving and encouraging leadership development in the NWRS, compared to 26-32% of employees at GS levels 12-14 (Table 378). Views of the effectiveness of long-term detail assignments were mixed, with 41% of GS-14 employees identifying them as very effective. Twenty-one percent to 27% of mid-level grade employees (GS-9 to GS-13) felt that long-term detail assignments would be very effective, while 35% of GS-5 and 31% of GS-7 level employees identified them as very effective (Table 379). Approximately 80% of employees at GS-9 and higher felt that decentralizing leadership development opportunities would be very effective or somewhat effective, compared to about 70% of employees below GS-9 (Table 380).
- Employees who aspired to Washington Office positions at some point in their careers rated long-term detail assignments and decentralization of leadership development opportunities as very effective more frequently (44% and 64%, respectively) than employees who aspired to regional office positions (33% and 47%) or refuge unit positions (18% and 40%; Tables 381-382). Employees with different career aspirations did not differ in their view of the effectiveness of short-term detail assignments.
- Other demographic factors (intent to spend career with the NWRS, projected retirement date, age, and region) had no effect on view of the effectiveness of leadership development opportunities.

Demographic Cross-Tabulations

- Employees with more years of service were much more likely to be men than women. 72% of employees with 20 or more years of service with the NWRS were men, compared to 64% of employees with 10-19 years of service and 56% of employees with less than 10 years of service (Table 383).

- Not surprisingly, refuge managers tended to have more years of service than employees in other occupational series (42% 20 or more years). Fewer than 20% of employees in all other occupational series had 20 or more years of experience (except for those in realty; Table 384).
- Years of service also had a predictable relationship with grade level. 42-100% of employees at GS-13 and higher had 20 or more years of experience (Table 385). Between 59% and 90% of employees at GS-9 or less had less than 10 years of service. Employees at GS-11 were about evenly split between the less than 10 years and 10-19 years of service categories (with only 13% having 20 or more years of service), while more than half of GS-12 employees had 10-19 years of experience.
- Nearly half of Washington Office employees had less than 10 years of service with the NWRS and 36% had 20 or more years. Only 18% of Washington Office employees had 10-19 years of NWRS service (Table 386). Regional offices also had a large proportion of employees with less than 10 years of service (42%), but employees with 20 or more years of service comprised only 23% of all employees in regional offices or refuge units.
- The cross-tabulation of highest level to which an employee aspired to work with years of NWRS service was similar to the comparison of where employees currently work. More than 40% of employees who aspired to a position in a regional office or the Washington Office had less than 10 years experience (Table 387). However, only 11% of employees who aspired to a position in the Washington Office had 20 or more years of service.
- Employees under the age of 40 were significantly less certain that they would spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS ($p < .001$). 51% of employees under the age of 30 and 41% of employees from 30-39 said they were uncertain or would not spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS (Table 388). In contrast, only 27% of employees from 40-49, 23% of employees from 50-59, and 15% of employees 60 and older said they were uncertain or would not spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS.
- Women (39%) were almost twice as likely as men (23%) to be uncertain or to say they would not spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS (Table 389).
- Refuge managers (88%), general maintenance employees (78%), and wildlife biologists (70%) were more likely to say they intended to spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS than employees in other occupational series (Table 390).
- 40% or more of employees at GS-9 level or below were uncertain or did not intend to spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS, compared with 31% or fewer at GS-11 or above (Table 391).
- Employees working on refuge units were more likely to say they intended to spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS (73%) than employees in the Washington Office (62%), and both were more likely than regional office employees to spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS (Table 392). Similarly, employees who aspired to jobs at

the refuge unit level (77%) were more likely to say they intended to spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS than employees who aspired to either regional office positions (66%) or Washington Office positions (60%; Table 393).

- Employees in the regions did not differ significantly in their intention to spend the rest of their careers with the NWRS (Table 394).
- Although the expected retirement of 79% of employees 60 years of age or older by 2014 is not surprising, the departure of 44% of employees in the 50-59 age bracket by 2014 seems significant (Table 395).
- 24% of refuge managers plan to retire by 2014 (Table 396). At the other extreme, 70% of wildlife biologists plan to retire after 2020.
- Although 49% of GS-14 employees plan to retire by 2014, 41% of GS-13, 58% of GS-12, and 65% of GS-11 employees plan to retire after 2020 (Table 397).
- Retirements through 2014 will hit the Washington Office (28%) and regional offices (26%) harder than refuge units (17%; Table 398).
- Projected retirement rates did not differ between men and women (Table 399) or among the regions (Table 400).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The NWRS faces many of the same personnel challenges that confront other natural resource agencies. Many of the people who work for the NWRS chose a career in natural resources because they had a passion for nature and the outdoors. Natural resource professionals often prefer to live and work in rural areas and to be in the field, rather than behind a desk (Magill 1988). As a result, many of them choose not to pursue career-advancing positions that would require them to relocate to more populous and costly areas, and into positions that take them out of the field and into administration (McMullin 2005, McMullin et al. 2005).

The survey results identify numerous challenges and opportunities, as well as some potential strategies, for the NWRS leadership to consider. It is encouraging to note that 80% of NWRS employees are willing to relocate at least once to achieve their ultimate career goals and more than half of them are willing to relocate two or more times. Although only 16% of employees said they would consider relocating to the Washington Office in the next few years, and 35% said they would consider relocating to a regional office, that still means that about 500 NWRS employees would consider relocating to the Washington Office and approximately 1,000 would consider relocating to a regional office. Another 20% of employees (600) were uncertain about relocating to the Washington Office and 25% (750) were uncertain about relocating to regional offices. Those are substantial pools of talent from which to recruit future leaders.

The survey results suggest that recruitment notices should appeal to opportunities for advancement, diversification of experience and ability to contribute significantly to achieving the NWRS mission. Combining those appeals with financial incentives for relocation, especially providing a housing allowance or a cash relocation incentive, should persuade more employees to consider advancement and relocation. However, before investing heavily in financial incentives to promote employee relocation, the NWRS should consider whether or not future applicant pools are likely to produce acceptable candidates. If not, then significant investment to encourage mobility is warranted. If the applicant pools are adequate, it would be wise to ask if the benefits of investment outweigh the costs.

Many NWRS employees will not consider relocating. Decentralizing some positions of leadership to locations outside of Washington or the regional offices may entice some of those employees to advance. Electronic communication tools have improved the ability to telecommute dramatically, and manage many program functions effectively from remote locations. NWRS leaders must decide if recruiting talented employees to leadership positions who otherwise might not apply for them is worth the extra effort involved. In an agency that has most of its employees in decentralized locations already, that may not be too great a challenge.

Although flexibility and alternative arrangements for encouraging employees to take on leadership responsibilities are good, the NWRS should continue to encourage employees to diversify their experience through relocating occasionally. The most effective and respected leaders in natural resource agencies tend to be people who have a variety of experiences in a variety of places, as well as excellent leadership qualities (McMullin 1993). Incentives that help employees to relocate more easily, such as those presented in the survey, may help to develop more and better prepared future leaders of the NWRS.

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