

1997 National Wildlife Refuge Survey

Overall Results
RESPONSE RATE = 89.5%

I. RESOURCES

2. My refuge is adequately staffed to meet its core conservation mission.

Agree = 12% Don't know = 0% Disagree = 88%

3. My refuge is adequately staffed to serve the visiting public.

Agree = 8% Don't know = 1% Disagree = 91%

4. Compared to other federal resource management agencies, government funding of the U.S. F&WS is keeping pace with refuge needs.

Agree = 1% Don't know = 3% Disagree = 96%

II. ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

5. Ecosystem/geographic reorganization within the region has improved my refuge's ability to fulfill its core conservation mission.

Agree = 8% Don't know = 8% Disagree = 84%

6. Ecosystem/geographic reorganization has strengthened rather than fragmented the programmatic identity of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Agree = 5% Don't know = 6% Disagree = 89%

7. Ecosystem/geographic reorganization has enhanced my working relationships with:

a) other refuge units within my ecosystem.

Agree = 24% Don't know = 4% Disagree = 72%

b) my regional office

Agree = 11% Don't know = 6% Disagree = 83%

III. INCOMPATIBLE USES

8. U.S. F&WS is currently committed to correcting compatibility problems on refuges.

Agree = 70% Don't know = 11% Disagree = 19%

9. I have made unpopular or controversial compatibility determinations on my refuge.

Agree = 54% Don't know = 23% Disagree = 23%

10. If the answer to question 9 is "Yes":

a) My regional office supported my compatibility determinations.

Agree = 45% Don't know = 48% Disagree = 7%

b) My regional office pressured me to change my compatibility determinations based on non-biological factors.

Agree = 10% Don't know = 60% Disagree = 30%

c) My regional office would be less supportive of me today in making controversial compatibility determinations.

Agree = 16% Don't know = 68% Disagree = 16%

11. Compatibility determinations have been implemented on my refuge in a timely fashion.

Agree = 79% Don't know = 8% Disagree = 13%

12. Members of my family or refuge staff have been harassed or threatened in connection with compatibility determinations or other resource management directives.

Agree = 20% Don't Know = 3% Disagree = 77%

IV. LEADERSHIP

13. My regional office is a strong advocate for my refuge.

Agree = 48% Don't know = 13% Disagree = 39%

14. As practiced within the agency the "bottom-up" decision-making process gives me a greater voice in regional management actions as they relate to my refuge.

Agree = 31% Don't know = 18% Disagree = 51%

15. Decisions affecting my field operations are increasingly made by agency officials who lack adequate knowledge or experience in refuge management.

Agree = 69% Don't know = 5% Disagree = 26%

16. The National Wildlife Refuge System should be a separate agency from the U.S. F&WS.

Agree = 49% Don't know = 20% Disagree = 31%

V. CONGRESS

17. My refuge operations are hampered by the absence of federal "organic" legislation for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Agree = 45% Don't know = 30% Disagree = 25%

18. The legislation being proposed by U.S. Representative Don Young (R-Alaska) -- H.R. 511, "The National Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997" -- would hinder my ability:

a) to conserve fish and wildlife on the refuge unit(s) under my management.

Agree = 81% Don't know = 17% Disagree = 2%

b) to eliminate uses incompatible with fish and wildlife conservation on refuge unit(s) under my management.

Agree = 75% Don't know = 22% Disagree = 3%

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SURVEY

"REFUGE MANAGERS SPEAK OUT"

Jump to: [Leadership](#) | [Ecosystem management](#) | [Resources](#) | [Identity](#) | [Conservation](#) | [Politics](#) | [Public Support](#)

Survey Question #19 In my opinion, the biggest problem facing the NWR System is:

Lack of effective, strong leadership within the agency. Too many people within the USFWS are in leadership positions with little or no refuge experience. They make decisions based on career-impact rather than what benefits wildlife. National Wildlife Refuges are being prostituted to special interests. We need integrity in leadership.

Regional directors who don't have the background or understanding of what the National Wildlife Refuge System stands for.

There is no service advocacy for the system. Most leadership positions in the service have never worked on a Refuge A-Z have no knowledge of the system.

Poor leadership at regional and Washington levels. The FWS has a history of promoting individuals into upper management positions who have no experience or working knowledge of refuges. This practice was exacerbated by the reorganization of authority geographically. Now more than ever there is a hierarchy in place that is completely out of touch with the Refuge System -- it is fragmented. Little programmatic consistency exists.

Top level administrators willing to make "political deals", rather than doing what is best for the resource.

Poor, weak, wishy-washy leadership. Most have zero or very little Refuge experience.

Regional Directors and Washington Directorate who have never worked on refuges to experience the daily hardships many of us endure. They can't conceive it, thus they can't advocate for us.

Washington and regional office personnel have completely lost touch with the realities of the field personnel. Furthermore, regional office staff does not ask for or listen to field personnel advice or recommendations. Field personnel are increasingly punished for speaking up against regional office policy.

Drifting Mission, disorganization, and lack of leadership.

Lack of direction and leadership. This is a chronic problem that will fluctuate some depending on who is in the various positions of power within the FWS but will never go away under our current structure with Refuges treated simply as a program or tool rather than as the precious system it really is.

Washington Regional Office Leadership with no goals or vision. Lots of buzz words, lots of talk, but no real commitment to the resource.

The absence of strong knowledgeable leaders and de-emphasis of refuges at higher levels have resulted in a weakened refuge system. Most regional directors pay lip service to refuges while pushing hot topics concerning endangered species and Ecological Services.

The Directorate (i.e. FWS leadership) is out of touch with the NWRS and has no land management experience. The Chief of the NWRS should be a Assistant Director - not a line staff position or the NWRS should be a separate agency.

Incompetent individuals in high level leadership positions within the service. Refuges will survive short dollars if they have support at Region Director level and above.

Total incompetence in Regional Offices and Washington Office. These people are more concerned about bureaucracy than they are about refuge wildlife. They totally ignore some refuges.

Lack of leadership of any kind, but especially folks with field experience on refuge. The directorate in D.C. and the regional directorate are becoming dominated by ecological service type which does not bode well for refuges.

Top management officials are more interested in pandering to social issues than concerning natural resources - too many decision are based on how we "feel" rather than hard data - public involvement "comments" carry greater weight than professional advice. If we won't exercise our authority, we don't have any.

2- ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

The internal reorganization to ecosystem/geographic Regional Offices has not gone smoothly. This has contributed greatly to increasing morale problems. The unprecedented groundswell of concern by Refuge Managers has largely been ignored by the Directorate. The reorganization may have been intended to help other USFWS programs but it is hurting the refuge system.

Ecosystem Management is good (great) at the field level. It's not working at the regional level.

The new ecosystem organization. Nobody has any idea who answers to whom. The new supervisors have no experience in the fields they supervise. No going back to the old organization, but keep the ecosystem teams so that division can help each other out.

Delivery of the ecosystem concept of management We are in a position of having to work for two supervisors, a programmatic one and an eco/geographical one, which results in less than total support -- not working!

We are now fighting amongst refuges to get "Ecosystem" money -- no one is willing or able to level the playing fields.

Ecosystem management -- can be valid if kept within a biological context and not in an administrative context.

The reorganization of the service under "ecosystem" management. Current structure is completely not working. Refuge project leaders in Regions 3,4,6,7 and 1 have collectively expressed more concerns about this and repeatedly said it's not working yet the Directorate ignores this.

Ecosystem management has fragmented our region. It is a worthy concept, but we should not try to administrate our refuges based on this concept.

There should be a distinction made between Ecosystem and geographic organizations. The ecosystem concept can work but it's the decision to go geographic or continue programmatic that must be made.

Fragmented organization caused by ecosystem reorganization. Ecosystem management is the only way to go, but "ecosystems" are whole, fine-tuned entities by definition-- not chaos.

Current "ecosystem organization" further dilutes the attention, respect and dollars needed for refuges.

"Fiddling while Rome burns." We have and are currently wasting time and effort trying to make geographic and ecosystem management work. Without question this is taking away from our attention to refuge management issues.

3- RESOURCES

The lack of adequate staffing and support funding to properly administer refuges. We are constantly asked to do more while staffing is cut. Elimination of administrative, law enforcement, and maintenance personnel have caused refuge operations and facilities to suffer badly while more emphasis is being put on providing public services. It is killing us!

Lack of staff. Lack of maintenance funds.

Many refuges are under staffed to accomplish mission fully.

Lack of adequate funding and staff to meet biological needs. Also need more advocacy at Regional and Washington levels to both correct this deficiency and to keep people like (Rep. Don)Young from thinking Refuges are just playgrounds for folks. He probably wouldn't try something like this with the National Park System.

Limited budgets and manpower; with increasing pressure for more public use.

Inadequate funding for personnel, operations and maintenance.

Lack of adequate base funding for resource protection and management, maintenance, and wildlife-oriented public use programs.

Lack of funds and staff to maintain habitats and facilities.

Lack of adequate funding/staff to fulfill the mission of the USFWS and our individual refuges.

The continuing static or decreasing base operations funding. Our ability to go outside of the Refuge boundaries and find creative ways to improve the ecosystem is severely hampered when we can't even do justice to our own properties. Many small refuges are being hurt by the continuing expansion of "new money" in the form of grants and/or requiring more complex proposals. We just don't have the staff

time to commit to getting funding in that manner and still do basic responsibilities like water management, baseline inventory, minimum public interpretation and resource protection.

Watering down the NWR system through bleeding of NWR's funds and staff to fulfill other FWS's responsibilities.

Continuing to accept more duties without additional funds. Making cuts in field stations without adequate cuts in RO and WO. Field folks do a lot of work with very little except dedication to the resource but no one in RO or WO appreciate the effort.

Poor representation and poor funding. We have an ever increasing population who are placing increasing demands and pressures on limited resources, and yet our abilities as managers keep failing farther and farther behind. We are basically on a downward spiral to failure.

4- IDENTITY

The recent reorganization within the FWS has resulted in severe fragmentation of Refuge System needs. The "System" is no longer managed as a system but rather as separate eco-regions, often without managers experienced in land management issues.

Lack of public identity and a clear mission and purpose.

System seems to be moving away from plain, ordinary habitat and species management, toward more people oriented goals -- perhaps to gain popularity & additional funding. This action may be at the expense of our original purpose...Never really accomplish anything.

Loss of morale and loss of identity of the refuge system due to the schizophrenic approach to present day management of the refuge system. The battle lines defending the refuge system keep moving and there is no united front line of defense, except for the Refuge Manager.

Identity of National Wildlife Refuge system needs to be separated from the regulatory functions of the agency, not merged together.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Lack of internal identity and support. Are we a regulatory agency with a land management role or a land management or an agency with a regulatory role? I would prefer a land management agency.

Lack of recognition -- refuges must become a separate and independent agency if we are to survive!

5- CONSERVATION

External pressure for economic AND recreational uses on FWS lands.

The system focuses much effort in status quo and not enough in proactive problem solving. To keep up with a fast-moving world, we need to be on the cutting edge more on emerging resource problems. We need habitat/wildlife understanding and future maintenance ability for the good of the refuge and the world beyond the fence.

There is a need for resources to be more proactive, far sighted, smarter and to allow for a more thoughtful job in protecting future wildlife and habitat resources.

The refuge system is just one tool in the FWS/federal agency arsenal for perpetuating native biodiversity-- we need much better private lands/international outreach and significant increases in overall, conservation program funding.

6- POLITICS

Need to keep politics out of refuge management. Members of Congress need to leave management of refuges to the professionals with input from public, instead of catering to "local", special interest groups. A good organic act should exclude Congressional interference.

When under assault we "circle the wagons and shoot at each other," engaging in "self-flagellation" in an attempt to avoid a perceived punishment by Congress.

The anti-Federal Government sentiment promoted by radical groups.

Appointments of the Director on down must be from within the organization. Too many political appointments. I have been in refuges for 31 years.

Lack of widespread congressional support.

Political entities have too much influence over Refuge Management.

Intervention by political entities -- local, state and federal. Lack of support from D.C.

Increasing management by politics rather than sound biology.

No staunch supporters in Congress!

Individual Congressmen failing to support environmental laws passed by their own peers. They are the only group I know that can circumvent, ignore and abuse federal laws without penalty!

Don Young!

Lack of Congressional support and knowledge of what the (refuge) System is about.

Lack of constituent/congressional support for the National Wildlife Refuge System in terms of generating needed funding and staffing. We need strong advocates in congress.

Lack of recognition -- both in the public and Washington, D.C. -- There are congress people who don't even know what is refuge is. Without such recognition we will not get the public support or the financial support need to effectively manage our lands.

Congress has recently bolstered funding for NWRS, however I do not believe refuges are seeing the full increases.

The biggest problem is the thought process symbolized by Wise Use, Don Young and the industrial/Congressional goon squad that's out to kill conservation. Don Young should be ridden out of Congress on a rail.

7- PUBLIC SUPPORT

Pressures from outside groups that would develop or continue non-wildlife oriented uses on refuge.

Lack of recognition by the public.

Lack of public awareness/support which directly influences degree and amount of political protection and funding.

Lack of recognition in the general public -- WO out of touch with refuges! No interest in really committing money to Outreach & Education. INS has an 8 billion dollar budget per year. How does the FWS - Refuge Budget compare? Maybe we do need to separate away from FWS.

Lack of support in protecting wildlife on Refuges because of the public's push for non-wildlife recreational access to Refuges.

Lack of support and recognition by the general public.

A majority of the general public is unaware of the FWS and its mission.

A weakening advocacy for the resource and a lack of public recognition.

Increasing urbanization of the nation's population resulting in people who have zero

understanding of the natural world. These people are often swayed by appeals to emotions and can be stampeded into causing uninformed political changes.

Lack of image -- hence very little public/political support. The NWR system is "Guilty by Association" within the FWS due to unpopular endangered species decisions which are very unpopular in Congress.

Clear goals & objective which do not change with the political atmosphere. Basing decisions on biological facts instead of politics. Understanding by the public of what the nation's Refuge system does for them, their quality of life!

The general public does not know who we are! We need to do more outreach and educate the public, congress, organizations, etc. on who, what, where and, why the NWRS is so important.

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE MANAGER SURVEY

Regional Breakdown

I. RESOURCES

2. My refuge is adequately staffed to meet its core conservation mission.

	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
	20	0	80
	4	0	96
	21	0	79
	3	0	97
	4	0	96
	6	0	94
	30	0	70

3. My refuge is adequately staffed to serve the visiting public

	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
	8	0	92
	4	4	92
	12	0	88
	8	0	92
	5	0	95
	6	2	92
	30	0	70

4. Compared to other federal resource management agencies, government funding of the U.S. F&WS is keeping pace with refuge needs

	Agree	Don't know	Disagree

	0	4	96
	0	4	96
	3	6	91
	3	0	97
	0	0	100
	2	3	95
	0	10	90

II. ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

5. Ecosystem/geographic reorganization within the region has improved my refuge's ability to fulfill its core conservation mission

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	10	14	76
II	15	4	81
III	3	3	94
IV	18	3	79
V	21	13	66
VI	3	11	86
VII	10	0	90

6. Ecosystem/geographic reorganization has strengthened rather than fragmented the programmatic identity of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	4	6	90
II	4	4	92
III	6	3	91
IV	8	5	87
V	13	13	74
VI	2	9	89
VII	0	0	100

7. Ecosystem/geographic reorganization has enhanced my working relationships with:

a) other refuge units within my ecosystem.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	10	4	86

II	31	0	69
III	18	3	79
IV	18	11	71
V	25	4	71
VI	5	3	92
VII	40	0	60

b) my regional office

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	27	0	73
II	4	0	96
III	3	0	97
IV	3	5	92
V	17	13	70
VI	8	3	89
VII	0	10	90

III. INCOMPATIBLE USES

8. U.S. F&WS is currently committed to correcting compatibility problems on refugees.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	69	16	15
II	38	12	50
III	55	24	21
IV	58	16	26
V	83	8	8
VI	91	2	7
VII	90	0	10

9. I have made unpopular or controversial compatibility determinations on my refuge.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	45	51	4
II	50	46	4
III	49	45	6
IV	61	34	5
V	67	29	4
VI	49	37	14

VII	90	10	0
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10. If the answer to question 9 is "Yes":

a) My regional office supported my compatibility determinations.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	45	53	2
II	27	50	23
III	43	51	6
IV	45	39	16
V	63	13	4
VI	42	56	2
VII	80	10	10

b) My regional office pressured me to change my compatibility determinations based on non-biological factors.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	6	55	39
II	31	50	19
III	9	88	3
IV	16	48	36
V	4	63	13
VI	2	40	58
VII	10	10	80

c) My regional office would be less supportive of me today in making controversial compatibility determinations.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	16	70	14
II	31	69	0
III	9	88	3
IV	24	53	13
V	17	58	25
VI	6	68	26
VII	40	30	30

11. Compatibility determinations have been implemented on my refuge in a timely fashion.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	81	8	11
II	50	15	35
III	79	12	9
IV	82	0	18
V	67	20	13
VI	91	6	3
VII	90	0	10

12. Members of my family or refuge staff have been harassed or threatened in connection with compatibility determinations or other resource management directives.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	27	4	69
II	23	12	65
III	21	3	76
IV	24	0	76
V	17	4	79
VI	11	2	87
VII	30	0	70

IV. LEADERSHIP

13. My regional office is a strong advocate for my refuge.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	49	13	38
II	23	12	65
III	36	34	30
IV	40	24	36
V	58	21	21
VI	63	2	35
VII	60	0	40

14. As practiced within the agency the "bottom-up" decision-making process gives me a greater voice in regional management actions as they relate to my refuge.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	25	35	40
II	19	4	75

III	14	15	70
IV	16	16	68
V	25	21	54
VI	57	9	34
VII	60	30	10

15. Decisions affecting my field operations are increasingly made by agency officials who lack adequate knowledge or experience in refuge management.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	57	4	39
II	69	4	27
III	79	3	18
IV	76	8	16
V	54	13	13
VI	73	2	25
VII	70	0	30

16. The National Wildlife Refuge System should be a separate agency from the U.S. F&WS.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	71	17	12
II	46	30	35
III	55	24	21
IV	50	18	32
V	50	21	29
VI	45	17	38
VII	30	10	60

V. CONGRESS

17. My refuge operations are hampered by the absence of federal "organic" legislation for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	49	35	16
II	46	27	27
III	49	30	21
IV	37	40	13
V	42	29	29

VI	40	34	26
VII	70	0	30

18. The legislation being proposed by U.S. Representative Don Young (R-Alaska) -- H.R. 511, "The National Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997" -- would hinder my ability:

a) to conserve fish and wildlife on the refuge unit(s) under my management.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	86	14	0
II	93	7	0
III	73	24	3
IV	82	18	0
V	84	8	8
VI	74	23	3
VII	80	10	10

b) to eliminate uses incompatible with fish and wildlife conservation on refuge unit(s) under my management.

%	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
I	82	16	2
II	85	11	4
III	70	27	3
IV	69	26	5
V	67	25	8
VI	71	25	4
VII	90	10	0