

1999 Survey of Refuge Managers of the National Wildlife Refuge System

TOTAL # of SURVEYS SENT: 380, TOTAL RETURNED TO PEER: 230

Response Rate = 61%

Direction of NWRS

1. In my view, the National Wildlife Refuge System is moving in the right direction.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 2 | 57 | 22 | 97 | 43 | 221 |
| 1% | 26% | 10% | 44% | 19% | 100% |

2. In the existing Fish & Wildlife Service structure, refuges can successfully compete for funding and staff positions.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 1 | 20 | 9 | 119 | 81 | 230 |
| 0% | 9% | 4% | 52% | 35% | 100% |

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

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 1 | 20 | 0 | 73 | 136 | 230 |
| 0% | 9% | 0% | 32% | 59% | 100% |

4. Refuges are seen by the current Fish & Wildlife Service leadership as subordinate to agency goals rather than as ends in themselves.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 71 | 113 | 31 | 13 | 2 | 230 |
| 31% | 49% | 13% | 6% | 1% | 100% |

5. I feel that the current leadership of the Fish & Wildlife Service listens to the opinions of refuge managers.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 3 | 41 | 21 | 104 | 57 | 226 |
| 1% | 18% | 9% | 46% | 25% | 100% |

Ecosystem Management

6. The 1998 re organization has improved communications between the Regional Office and my refuge.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 0 | 12 | 15 | 116 | 85 | 228 |
| 0% | 5% | 7% | 51% | 37% | 100% |

7. I fully understand the objectives that the Directorate is trying to achieve with the Ecosystem Approach.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 4 | 66 | 34 | 92 | 34 | 230 |
| 2% | 29% | 15% | 40% | 15% | 100% |

8. The agency=s implementation of the Ecosystem Approach is consistent with the philosophy behind ecosystem management.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 0 | 33 | 42 | 112 | 41 | 228 |
| 0% | 14% | 18% | 49% | 18% | 100% |

9. The Ecosystem Approach is helpful in dealing with the problems facing my refuge.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 2 | 44 | 9 | 116 | 50 | 221 |
| 1% | 20% | 4% | 52% | 23% | 100% |

The Regional Office

10. I feel that I have an advocate in the Regional Office for the needs of my refuge.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 23 | 87 | 22 | 70 | 28 | 230 |
| 10% | 38% | 10% | 30% | 12% | 100% |

11. My Regional Office is actively assisting me in addressing problems on my refuge.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|

| | | | | | |
|----|-----|----|-----|-----|------|
| 14 | 84 | 16 | 88 | 27 | 229 |
| 6% | 37% | 7% | 38% | 12% | 100% |

12. Increasingly, decisions affecting my refuge are made by persons without adequate training or background in refuge management.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 66 | 113 | 14 | 34 | 2 | 229 |
| 29% | 49% | 6% | 15% | 1% | 100% |

13. There are too many layers of decision-makers in the Regional Office.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 97 | 96 | 15 | 20 | 0 | 228 |
| 43% | 42% | 7% | 9% | 0% | 100% |

14. I believe that staff positions (FTE=s) have gone unfilled at my refuge in order to support the Ecosystem Approach.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 58 | 72 | 65 | 29 | 3 | 227 |
| 26% | 32% | 29% | 13% | 1% | 100% |

Future of NWRS

15. Passage of the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 has made a positive difference for my refuge.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 17 | 78 | 69 | 58 | 6 | 228 |
| 7% | 34% | 30% | 25% | 3% | 100% |

16. Preserving the programmatic identity of the National Wildlife Refuge System is crucial if the NWRS is to fulfill its promise.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 136 | 80 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 229 |
| 59% | 35% | 4% | 1% | 1% | 100% |

17. If you had to choose, which alternative is better for the National Wildlife Refuge System:

| | | |
|---|-----|------|
| Chain of Command (Campfire Proposal) | 134 | 60% |
| Agency (Audubon Proposal) | 76 | 34% |
| Light Office Reorganization (Jamie Clark) | 3 | 1% |
| None of the Above | 9 | 4% |
| | 222 | 100% |

18. Congress should hold hearings on the future of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| 72 | 72 | 43 | 26 | 12 | 225 |
| 32% | 32% | 19% | 12% | 5% | 100% |

Safety

19. Members of my family or refuge staff have been harassed or threatened in connection with resource management policies.

| Yes | No | Total |
|-----|-----|-------|
| 73 | 152 | 225 |
| 32% | 68% | 100% |

If the answer to question 19 is yes, were you encouraged to report the incident?

| Yes | No | Total |
|-----|-----|-------|
| 25 | 35 | 60 |
| 42% | 58% | 100% |

REFUGE MANAGERS SPEAK OUT!

IN MY VIEW, THE NWRS COULD MOST BE IMPROVED BY...

[Most frequent essay topic in descending order of frequency]

1. Structural Changes to Improve the Programmatic Identity of the NWRS

2. Funding & Resources

3. Making NWRS a Separate Agency (pro & con)

4. Knowledgeable Leadership

5. The Ecosystem Approach (pro & con)

6. Combating Political Influences/ Keeping the Focus on Wildlife

7. Harassment

8. Comments About the Survey

I. Structural Changes to Improve the Programmatic Identity of the NWRS

Listening and implementing the Campfire Proposal. Shouldn't over 100 refuge managers know what's best for the Refuge Systems!?!

The entire directorate of the FWS is from Ecological Services--Refuge System could be improved by increasing the portion of the directorate that comes from a refuge background. The tail is definitely wagging the dog at the current time.

Going back to a strong programmatic structure. A separate agency could have unforeseen pitfalls. The Campfire Proposal would be the best approach and the most likely to be implemented.

A different organizational structure with a leader who has line authority to National Wildlife Refuges, has the NWRS as a full-time job, and has ample field experience working on and for the NWRS.

"Promises" is great, but it doesn't address the Refuge System being buried in the organization of the FWS--a problem exacerbated each time there is a reorganization (window dressing that does NOT address the problem).

Implementing most or all of the Campfire Proposal, primarily establishing a separate bureau of division within the FWS with funding and supervisory control separate from the remainder of the Service.

Restructuring as outlined in the Campfire Proposal and continue working with the Refuge CARE group which has given such terrific support over the past several years.

Put the NWRS under a deputy director with line authority.

A clearer line of authority for refuges from DC to field, with less regional influence on refuge management to achieve a NWR system, not regional systems.

Simplifying organizational structure. Taking full advantage of the interest generated by the CARE group to fund refuges.

We need less bureaucracy--not more--as was the result of the last 2 reorganizations.

Refuge advocates in the Directorate are non-existent--it's time to emancipate ourselves from our Ecological Services masters.

The FWS stopping the use of refuges as tools to achieve agency-wide objectives. Refuges are more than that, and deserving of at least equal treatment within the agency. There seems to be a trend towards elevating our Ecological Services Division's issues and influence while NWRS influence within the agency is lessening.

II. Funding & Resources

My refuge is very underfunded, but I'm not sure I can blame ES for it. I think poor allocation of resources, poor management and politics at the regional level are the biggest culprits.

Increased staffing [and] increased visibility among Americans.

Any government entity needs public support to thrive. We need to provide a product our customers are willing to pay for with their taxes. Public support will improve NWRS more than anything else.

Organizational structure is definitely a problem but the NWRS badly needs additional funds for land acquisition - why is so much of the revenue siphoned off by Congress for other purpose?

We have good support for meeting resource needs including endangered species recovery by starting new refuges and acquiring habitat, however, funding for O&M is not readily available.

Filtering more funds to the field instead of additional upper administrative level. We are going backwards from our streamlining middle management.

Money always seems to be siphoned off to non-refuge projects.

Placing the bulk of funding, resources, and effort out to the field.

Make sure every field station has at least one true biologist doing good biological work such as surveys, censuses, monitoring changes due to mgmt., and keeping current on recent research.

We have done more with less for so long it seems it is now expected of us.

We work hard to start new refuges but we don't take care of the ones we have. If you are not a showcase you're on the bottom of the money pile.

Putting a biologist at every station that has personnel and eliminating the maintenance backlog.

III. Making NWRS a Separate Agency (pro & con)

Creating a separate agency within Interior. As it stands now, the Directorate will always be dominated by personnel from other Service Divisions with little or no Refuge background.

While a separate Bureau may be good for Refuges in the short term, will it be good for wildlife nationwide in the long term? If Refuges pulls out of FWS what happens to Ecological Services and the ESA? Refuges are my life. I hope we will support what is good for wildlife, not just Refuges.

Before something like Audubon's proposal is adopted there needs to be a thorough analysis of consequences of a separate agency. It sounds great on the surface but it may come with reduced funding/staffing in the end and that would not benefit anyone.

Achieving separate agency status. Any changes made within the USF&W are only good until the next director decides on further changes. I'm tired of being constantly jerked around and don't trust our current leadership.

Separation from FWS. Are we a regulatory agency with a land management branch or a management agency with a regulatory branch--recent history has shown we can't be both.

Separating from the Fish & Wildlife Service. How many of our FWS leaders (D.C. Directorate, Regional Directors) have any refuge experience?

The creation of a separate agency will make us more effective at achieving our goals, elevating our identity, competing for funds, and reaching the stature we need to do right by the resource.

Under a separate agency the NWRS could focus its full attention on fulfilling its mission without competition for funds, ideas, and other resources with other FWS bureaus that have completely different missions and philosophies.

A separate agency whose sole mission is the protection, restoration, and management of refuge lands. Each year we spend more and more time away from the refuge lands and these lands need our full attention.

Keep the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service together...the critters and their habitats will suffer if the flagship of the Service pulls out.

Dividing the NWRS and pulling Refuges out is not good for the whole system. Our Refuge frequently relies on Ecological Services, fisheries offices, hatcheries, etc. The Refuges just need a boost with a separate line and budget authority directly to ARDs.

Under current organization, Administration suppresses Refuge identity, management, and morale. The NWRS would be revolutionized by strong leaders in a separate agency.

Within a reasonable time frame, if we cannot elevate the status of the System, then I say we break out on our own from FWS and see where it leads us!

Disassociating it from the regulatory aspects of ES. They should be put in with the EPA.

A separate identity like the NPS. We need our own identity, separate from the permits, game agents, researchers, endangered species biologists, etc. We are the only ones dealing with a land base that can't be continually underfunded without serious repercussions that will affect generations to come!

Having our own Director making us equal to the other land managing agencies.

IV. Knowledgeable Leadership

Too many line supervisors in the current organization have no experience on refuges at the field level and even worse have no love for refuges and what its people stand for.

There is no substitute for field experience. It is appalling that so many GARDs, PARDs, and Refuge Supervisors have no field experience. People like Dan Ashe and down don't have a clue about the challenges faced by Refuge Managers, yet make decisions that affect us every day.

A Director with NWRS experience. We're getting closer-let's get one that's lived in our shoes.

Eliminating bias/requirement of WO experience for high level/top positions.

Replacement of the Director. It seems, at every opportunity to date, the current Director has done everything possible to subjugate the NWRS.

Requiring Refuge Supervisors at all levels to have refuge field experience.

Instead of requiring Washington Office experience for our upper-level management positions, we should require refuge field experience for Washington office staff.

Strong leadership by staff who have come up through the NWRS.

A change to a Directorate that recognizes and believes in the core mission of refuges. We have been spread so thin by the OVER EMPHASIS on partnerships and ecosystem that we are no longer leaders but followers.

A strong line of command that has years of refuge experience. Nearly all of the supervisors do not have refuge experience--living and working on a refuge.

I feel my Regional Office is doing its best in spite of the Washington Office.

The Washington understanding the needs of the field and addressing those needs and concerns.

Listening to the Refuge Managers and accepting the input received.

The W.O.s and the R.O.s all have priorities but keep saying that only the Ecosystem teams are raising priorities. The teams are capable of raising issues and conducting some activities but are incapable of formulating priorities for the entire Regional Office. In other words, we need some degree of leadership along with the cheerleading.

Regardless of where we end up as an organizational entity (whether part of a NWR Service or part of a larger Land Management Agency) if we don't do a better job of hiring, training, and mentoring Refuge Managers than we have done through this last cycle, we will find ourselves with new uniforms and a new patch and no one to run the railroad!

V. The Ecosystem Approach (pro & con)

I agree with the need to think and manage more holistically as the Ecosystem Approach proposed, but the effect of how it is managed results in useless and wasteful activities and efforts. We are revving our engine but are stuck in neutral.

I'm worried by the obvious strengthening of the ecoteams. This is the administration's attempt to manage a refuge by committee. Having an ecosystem approach to management is a far cry from having an ecoteam that could, potentially, decide your priorities for management, acquisition and construction and dictate what your budget will be.

I strongly believe that the ecosystem approach is good for the resource. I have seen cooperation on resource issues that did not happen prior to ecosystem teams... Even though I support the ecosystem approach the GARDs just add another useless layer to our bureaucracy.

Managers should use the ecosystem approach but include local and state governments and local communities, not just FWS personnel.

Eliminating GARD positions nationwide. There is much duplication, turf battles, and egos getting in the way.

The Ecosystem Approach has succeeded in tearing down the cohesiveness and camaraderie of refuge personnel. Refuges practiced ecosystem management long before it became a buzzword.

A major reduction in the layers at the Regional Office. The reorganization with GARDs and PARDs is not working. We have been saying this for years. Much like >Pounding a square peg in a round hole. One destroys the entire peg to please only a few.

Current leadership (WO to RO level) does not know what ecosystem mgmt. is...much less can they explain it to anyone... The Ecosystem approach has alienated some state Fish & Game Depts. as well as NGOs. Ecosystem mgmt. should not dictate organizational structure...as it has...now NWRS is buried under the Services' pile!

Eliminate PARD/GARD tension-filled fiasco. It has deteriorated-not enhanced-communication.

VI. Combating Political Influences/ Keeping the Focus on Wildlife

I don't want to see Congress mucking around because the response could be political; however, I'm not sure the FWS is capable of making appropriate changes without encouragement.

We need some back bone on issues and political expediency just diminishes morale.

ARO and WO having guts enough to stand up to political pressure from Congress. Refuges need to be managed on sound biological data and resource mgmt. principles even if Congressmen and Senators threaten our funding. Even if they actually reduce refuge budgets we should stick to our principles; we are compromising too much.

Implementing the NWRSI Act of 1997 as intended by law.

For once, just once, I would ask my colleagues--from the WO all the way to the field managers--to set their egos aside. Think what is best for the land we have promised to protect. We all know that what is best is to have the strongest NWRS possible. We know that. So do it. Make it so.

Allowing refuge managers to focus on biology, wildlife management, habitat restoration, land acquisition, and law enforcement. There is currently too much emphasis on outreach and looking outside the boundary while, in many cases, inside the boundary is in total disarray.

The USFWS recognizing refuges for what they are--the very cornerstone on which the Service was built. Refuge management and all refuge concerns should be central to the Service rather than auxiliary. Refuges and the employees staffing them should be recognized as the front-line defenders of habitat and wildlife in this country--but our agency doesn't even give us that recognition, so it unlikely that the public will.

VII. Harassment

I have been assaulted and injured while doing law enforcement and trying to protect wildlife/habitat resources.

In some areas harassment or indirect (implied) threats have just been considered part of doing business.

I am being harassed locally but so far just professionally - with some personal.

[There have been] death threats against my children related to an LE incident. [The] incident was handled through the U.S. Attorney and U.S. Marshals. The response from these folks was immediate and effective. Doubt if any Refuge records were kept.

Harassment by irate visitors is not uncommon but so far it has not been serious.

I feel neutral on this. The two incidents happened prior to OK City Bombing. I must admit if they had happened after, I would not have hesitated to report in a formal manner.

The threat to my life was reported to the FBI and the FBI acted quickly on the threat.

At the time I didn't bother to report the threatened death of my children--I dealt with it. Harassment in the 90's was approached as are most issues--I try to kill my own snakes. Translation: I inherit FWS snakes but treat them as mine.

VIII. Comments About the Survey

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak freely on this issue. There appears to be a lot of support among the rank and file for this new agency. Unfortunately, we cannot discuss it openly with USFWS. As past experience has shown, to do so would be considered treasonous. Please continue to help give us a voice.

Thanks for your help Gene. (Gene Hocutt is a 29-year NWRS veteran/PEER's Refuge Keeper)

Your survey has a strong bias in its presentation and wording of questions. The only reason I filled it out is because I believe the majority of those who return this questionnaire will be those supportive of your philosophies. I am just trying to contribute a balance to your responses.