

2001 Refuge Manager Survey *Results*

Operations and Maintenance

1. MMS adequately assesses the maintenance backlog at my refuge.

3.6% strongly agree 44.5% agree 1.5% no opinion 32.1% disagree 17.5% strongly disagree

2. NWRS funding systems allow adequate flexibility to deal with contingencies that arise during the fiscal year.

0.7% strongly agree 10.9% agree 2.1% no opinion 48.9% disagree 36.5% strongly disagree

3. My refuge's habitat management programs are negatively impacted by inadequate funding.

58.4% strongly agree 29.2% agree 2.2% no opinion 8.0% disagree 1.5% strongly disagree

Operations and Maintenance on my refuge could be improved by... see essay responses.

Budget

4. Management of my refuge is adversely impacted because budget allocations are transmitted to me four to six months late.

59.1% strongly agree 33.6% agree 5.1% no opinion 1.5% disagree 0.7% strongly disagree

5. Basic funding (salaries, fixed expenses and annual FTE allowances) at my refuge continues to decline in real terms.

58.4% strongly agree 35.8% agree 1.5% no opinion 2.9% disagree 0.7% strongly disagree

6. I believe that money and FTEs for my refuge are diverted to meet other FWS needs.

47.7% strongly agree 33.6% agree 16.8% no opinion 2.2% disagree 0.7% strongly disagree

The NWRS budgeting process could be improved by ... see essay responses.

Regional Office

7. The year 2000 reorganization has significantly improved the delivery of money and staff to meet my refuge's needs.

0.7% strongly agree 13.9% agree 14.6% no opinion 41.6% disagree 28.5% strongly disagree

8. More effective Afeedback loops are needed between RO staff and field refuge managers in matters of funding and FTE requests.

23.4% strongly agree 50.4% agree 13.1% no opinion 10.9% disagree 2.2% strongly disagree

9. Successful experience as a refuge project leader should be prerequisite to appointment to RO and WO refuge supervisory positions.

51.1% strongly agree 39.4% agree 3.6% no opinion 3.6% disagree 1.5% strongly disagree

My refuge's relations with the Regional Office could be improved by... see essay responses

Compatibility

10. The order of listing of the six priority wildlife dependant recreational uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, environmental education, interpretation, and photography) create compatibility conflicts.

5.1% strongly agree 7.3% agree 22.6% no opinion 51.8% disagree 13.1% strongly disagree

11. I believe that requirements for regional office oversight approval of refuge compatibility determinations will inject politics into what should be a biological decision.

14.6% strongly agree 38.7% agree 18.2% no opinion 25.5% disagree 2.9% strongly disagree

12. Including state fish and wildlife personnel on the core planning team for Comprehensive Conservation Planning (CCP) is a positive move.

9.5% strongly agree 54.0% agree 20.4% no opinion 13.1% disagree 2.9% strongly disagree

Compatibility determinations could be improved by...see essay responses.

Personnel

13. Current OPM pass/fail performance standards are an improvement over previous rating systems.

4.4% strongly agree 27.7% agree 17.5% no opinion 25.5% disagree 23.4% strongly disagree

14. The supervisory training I received prepared me well to be an effective supervisor.

1.5% strongly agree 43.8% agree 21.9% no opinion 27.8% disagree 3.6% strongly disagree

15. FWS provides adequate training programs for my staff.

8.0% strongly agree 62.0% agree 6.6% no opinion 15.3% disagree 6.6% strongly disagree

Personnel management on my refuge could be improved by...see essay responses.

2001 REFUGE MANAGER SURVEY

Essay Responses

Note: Each paragraph is from a different respondent.

Operations and Maintenance on my refuge could be improved by:

"Making sure all Operations and Maintenance funds leaving Washington make it to refuge stations. We are now banking on RONS to somehow bail out the O&M deficit."

"Adequate funding for maintenance positions, equipment and contingencies."

"Fully funding staffing plan and providing operational contingency money."

"Hiring maintenance staff. Currently no maintenance staff assigned to refuge."

"Funding station priorities, not funding obvious weak projects that have the right buzz words."

"Legislature and Congress needs to give more funds. Our staff is not totally funded, after expenses, we have less than \$50,000 to run a 13 person refuge for 1 year."

"More equitable allocations. Certain 'key', high-profile refuges get money, and others of us don't compete as well. Also it depends on the refuge supervisors and how good they are at speaking up for their stations. Some seem to get a lot and others seem to get nothing. Sometimes it comes down to...who's better at lying or exaggerating."

"Greater flexibility in responding to changing priorities, more influence from field in what actual priorities are at field station, less dictating from WO."

The NWRS budgeting process could be improved by:

"Insuring that R.O. supervisors follow the spirit and intent of process, that is, quit 'cooking the books' to look better/good which distorts the real picture and analysis/correction process."

"Doing as Congress instructed and keep Refuge Funds in Refuges. Timely, budgets would help but I start the FY as if I have my budget in hand."

"Funding the field first instead of last. Actually allowing 2 year budgeting would help also. We might be able to save a few dollars over a 2 year period to fund some projects. Now we are bound to spend it so someone else doesn't steal it."

"Insuring the budget submission process stays constant - currently it changes every year."

"Opening up the Budget distribution for all to see."

"Insuring that money that is intended for field stations, actually gets to them."

"Perhaps having Congress set specific budgets for individual refuges rather than the 'trickle-down' approach we have now."

"Allowing flexibility to deal with on-the-spot emergencies which occur outside the five-year plans."

"Asking managers to participate in the budget process rather than be directed to make do with whatever 'share' is issued 6 months into the FY."

My refuge's relations with the Regional Office could be improved by:

"Them improving their efficiency - they seem to be ineffective at servicing field stations in a timely manner."

"1.) Having input into decisions before they are made. 2.) Better communication."

"The refuge chief actually having refuge experience."

"RO folks having a little better understanding of what we now face in the field, especially with budget and spending constraints. Let the RO fellas get in the field more."

"My supervisor having the time to make a trip to my station to better understand what is going on."

"Having true leaders in decision-making positions, rather than our current conflict-avoidance specialist leadership."

Compatibility determinations (assessment of a refuge's mission versus its programs) could be improved by:

"Having professional consultants writing them instead of adding this responsibility on the refuge managers and their staff."

"RO and WO staff not playing politics when someone opposed to the change complains."

"Having a centralized database of compatibility determinations which managers could review to ensure consistency across regions."

"Keeping RO politics out of it. But that will never happen as long as there are RO's. I say abolish the ROs that would save a lot of money. Those people are way more hassle than help."

"...Recognizing that there are difficult issues where a >one policy fits all' approach just will not work."

"Being more consistent with criteria - less politics."

"Improving our knowledge of the rules and procedures and being able to respond using biology and common sense."

Personnel management on my refuge could be improved by:

"More staff, less unnecessary paper-work to ease the demands on current staff, devote more time to on-the-ground resource results."

"Cutting some of the red tape for simple fill and hire positions. You can improve skills of a good supervisor but you can't train a poor supervisor to be a good one."

"Better service in the Personnel office and in Regional Office."

ESSAY:

Briefly describe other actions FWS should implement to help you and your staff fulfill the mission of your refuge and the NWRS (other than the obvious staffing and budgeting needs)

FWS

"A roving team of maintenance workers and heavy equipment could expedite backlogged maintenance needs. Permit/regulatory staff assigned to address refuge compliance and/or staff and the ES office to expedite refuge project permits. Red tape by FWS staff on Refuge FWS is a bummer...didn't we both go to the same school/classes? Geez!"

"FWS leadership needs to closely define service resource goals and to clarify how refuges (individually and as a system) should contribute to these goals. In tight budget situations, we can't continue to try to be all things to all people."

"The main problem with refuges and the entire FWS is supervisors that put themselves first and getting along with Partners and State F&G Agencies rather than trust resources and the land base habitat. There seems to be no one willing to make a resource decision. The RO & WO staffs are too big and non functional."

Separate Agency

"We need to be a separate Bureau so that we are not over shadowed by enhancement/endangered species issues."

"I firmly believe the only way we will ever receive adequate recognition, hence funding and staffing, is to become an independent department-level agency."

"The National Wildlife Refuge System needs to be its own agency, like the NPS. Refuge divisions in Regional Offices should be moved out of Denver to smaller communities."

"FWS should encourage Congress to create a separate refuge agency."

Funding and Support

"Determine base costs for each refuge based on approved objectives - then fund base costs first in the budget processes."

"Our leadership has stated that (in a report to Congress) Refuge operations budgets have risen 32% since 1997. However, the refuge I work on has only seen a 12% increase, so where did the other 20% of \$79 million dollars go? My question is: Are we alone in this or did anyone see the increase stated on 3/29/01?"

"Need help (\$) updating computers, don't have staff and \$ for GIS capability - other agencies are leaving us behind."

"Instead of trying to do more with less each year, we need to submit to Congress and the Executive Branch a list of all the services, public use opportunities, facilities, etc., that will be closed, including entire refuges if necessary, to the public until we get adequate funding and recognition. We need a Refuge shutdown just like the Government shutdowns in the past."

"Provide adequate support for public use program, cultural resources, budgeting & CGS."

"Reward refuges that come under budget by letting them keep the money instead of moving it to refuges that over spent. If refuge gets money to do a survey then doesn't get the snow conditions to do the survey let them keep the \$ to next year. Don't give them less \$ the next year because they didn't spend all their \$ the year better."

"1.) Put habitat management staff and funding first. Public use and bureaucratic paperwork are consuming all available resources, 2.) Regional offices should support the field rather than vice versa't think the current design does this - maybe about 30% of RO programs . I don't support the field, in my opinion."

"Get legislation (or what ever it takes) to allow field offices to purchase up to \$10,000. The \$2,500 limit is too low. Get more support in Engineering so projects don't take so long. Small projects often take a year to complete due to Engineering then Contracting. Get more archeological help. In my region, there is only 1 Archeologist for 10 states, Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands! Need More Help!"

Retirement

"Additional, line item budget for law enforcement. Greater lead time for budgets, reports, etc. More assistance from 'subject matter experts' at the RO - rather than compliance inspections. Less lipservice and eyewash on morale issues - and more substantive action on real morale issues such as 6C retirement for Law Enforcement/Firefighters."

"Openly address the 6C retirement issue now facing mostly retired refuge officers but will soon involve many active officers. This is a larger morale issue than PEER or most in FWS upper management realize. The service is now willing to do what is proper to convert law enforcement/fire employees into correct position descriptions that are A6C covered". However, the service is not recognizing and ignoring (and penalizing) those employees that have done this same law enforcement and fire program work for the past 20, 30, 40 years. This is a very bitter pill!"

"Morale on some Refuges is low due in part to the lack of the service's support on the 6C Retirement issue. On the positive side the new SCEP and STEP programs are very good."

Regional Office

"I would recommend decreasing the amount of Regional Officer oversight and involvement with Refuge actions. Interactions WAN the Regional Office are cumbersome and they are not able to provide us with any help, because they lack Aon the ground" expertise. Refuge managers are more effective, working with staff and field supervisors at handling issues

specific to the Refuge. We need to put more staff in the field where the work is done and decrease the layers in the Regional Office..."

"Somehow stop worrying about involving RO supervisors and refuge managers on teams and task forces and get these folks back on the refuge and allow them to do their jobs. RO supervisors have lost touch with the field and do not have a good idea of what is going on their stations. They need to be able to visit more, do station inspections. We don't get a lot of feedback on the type of job we're doing as managers."

"Discussion sessions between RO and individual Field Station to develop goals for addressing station needs and deficiencies, and selecting a realistic time frame to accomplish them."

"Some how stop worrying about involving RO supervisors and refuge managers on teams and task forces and get these folks back on the refuges and allow them to do their jobs. RO supervisors have lost touch with the field and do not have a good idea of what is going on in their stations. They need to be able to visit more, do station inspections. We don't get a lot of feedback on the type of job we're doing as managers."

"If an individual refuge has an important project going on that the community highly supports, the Regional staff should be assisting the Refuge staff not being a road block. The Refuge staff knows the refuge best and the community better than someone sitting in an office 600 miles from the Refuge."

"In my region, responsibility and authority for refuge management decisions are being assumed at the RO level. Staffing at the GS-14 and 15 levels in the RO has increased significantly over the past few but with no new staffing increases at the refuge levels. These 14 & 15 positions have too little constructively to do and so only interfere with operations on the individual refuges. This is a ridiculous and counter productive situation, but is happening with the RO's knowledge and approval."

Comprehensive Conservation Fund

"Implement the Comprehensive Conservation Plan on stations with "approved" plans. However, it appears this effort will be no more than a massive paperwork exercise, as increased funding is highly unlikely. In short, we gave all the opportunity to interact, particularly State Fish and Game Agencies (now they will serve as the actual core team) who consistently try and push their agendas on the refuges. In short these plans identify accomplishments to be completed, including specific 'step down' management plans, etc. However, in most cases the 'selected' alternative in the plan, the 'Preferred Alternative' is selected, in reality most likely with no funding increases. Herein lies the problem - people's expectations to see the 'referred Alternative' implemented. So if funding is not available we're back to 'status quo' operations. Don't get me wrong - those CCPs can be worthwhile documents, as a tremendous amount of staff/dollars efforts went into their completion. If promises were made to state fish and game agencies in particular one can bet they will continue to push their agendas regardless of service funding, add to the fact the RO can remove a refuge manager's authority to do the Compatibility Determinations, and one gets a clear picture of where we are headed. This scenario can also pertain to other questionable activities such as snow mobiling, horseback riding, mountain biking, etc. The CCP is an excellent document if completed effectively. However, due to the Service' lack of leadership, we may have taken the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act and created a document which everyone can use to 'eat' the refuge system over the head with - time will tell."

"Reduce the amount required administrative paper work and reporting routinely required of field stations (i.e. audits, safety reports, recreation surveys, and biological reports). Fund

Comprehensive Conservation Plans as an addition to normal operations rather than expecting routing activities to cease for 2 or 3 years while refuge staff is consumed by major planning activities."

"More emphasis on fish and wildlife and less emphasis on CCP and planning. Why plan if you don't have funds to carry out the plans. Get more field oriented people less bureaucrats, less computers, more habitat management."

"Make the CCP process more simple and commit to getting CCP's done."

Management

"Be able to return and obtain the best and brightest. Move or remove those who have little ability or refuse to change. Refuges are no place for individuals to secure their retirement homes but they are places for forward thinking managers and staff to provide sound stewardship into the future."

"Being in an agency that is run by the regulators (ESA), makes it very difficult to be an effective manager. You are guilty by association."

- "Improved outreach and awareness leading to more public and congressional support.
- Understand what it takes to manage land, to work in watersheds and landscapes, to address limiting factors, and to understand what it takes to understand our refuges through survey, research, and other important baseline needs.
- Give us tools to greet, manage, and meet the public and their use on refuges."

"The role of the range manager (project leader) has been continually deteriorating in recent years. PL's have less and less authority to make day to day decisions regarding Refuge Management. Everyone seems to want a piece, comment, approval, etc on basic decisions, management, planning charts, priorities, etc making it more complicating to get even simple things accomplished. It is almost impossible to get anything accomplished anymore. More and more administration, paperwork, justification, etc."

Programs

"Centennial planning & implementation. Complete appropriate uses of policy & guidance. Maintain emphasis on biological programs for NWRS. Push for NWRS Biology Conference every two years at NCTC. Set high standards for Lands & Waters that should be part of the NWRS."

"We have very good training programs, but more refuge employees should have better opportunity to learn about Refuge programs and policies. I was fortunate to attend the Refuge Academy, but feel that there is not enough opportunity for employees to all have this type of training. I work with two refuge managers that are new to the Service and this training would be very beneficial for them, especially understanding (fully) compatibility issues (or other decisions) where a solid understanding of who we are and what we do is necessary - to fulfill our mission."

Miscellaneous

"Why is this questionnaire coming from an independent group? Where's the FWS leadership? Why are they not sending this type of questionnaire? Establish a separate NWRS agency."

"Recently GPA requirements for college students were lowered for the SCEP program. We are no longer seeking the best and brightest, which will ultimately have a negative impact on the service."

"Remove the politics from the Regional Directorate Level. Our Regional Director is lobbying hard to become part of the Bush Administration. His agenda is affecting how he represents resource issues, refuge budgets and existing problems within his own shop. As mentioned above, Regional Chief is also very political and will not take a position until knowing which way 'Winds' are Blowing... Which is why decisions come hard if at all."

"CUMULATIVE EFFECTS - BUREAUCRACY, When it involves habitat loss it is hard to get a handle on, insidious and potentially devastating to wildlife population. Likewise the cumulative effects of our ever burgeoning bureaucracy can be very damaging to employee morale and productivity. Our bureaucracy seems to have exploded in the last few years and is taking a toll on everyone and driving a wedge between the field and the regional offices. Of the many bureaucratic anchors, one of the most troublesome is the burdensome hiring process. The current requirements for achieving diversity, while well-intentioned, have made the hiring process into a very discouraging undertaking, to the point of being a real deterrent. Many positions are going unfilled for extended periods of time due to this onerous process. This hurts the resource, places more burden on existing staff, and detracts from our credibility with the public and other agencies - in short, hurts, not helps us accomplish our mission. The fact that the end justifies the means is probably the very definition of bureaucracy and in this case, the process, no matter how carefully couched and crafted, is morally offensive and, at some level, seems un-American."

"Recognize that there are needs and important issues on small to middle sized refuges. Too many times VIP visits occur on the more important flagship" stations. Their issues are enlarged out of proportions because of name recognition. The smaller stations have to fight for RO and Regional Directorate attention."

"Develop stronger refuge line authority. A separate NCR system agency is NOT needed. Put Regional Chiefs of Refuges under line authority of Washington Refuge Chief - NOT Regional Directors! This would clarify direction, budgeting, planning,...etc..."

"1.) The realty program is awful. 2.) They cut initial allocation for personnel, then give us the exact equal amount in RONS money. But we can't use the money for habitat improvement - it goes to keep staff on Payroll. 3.) The RO staff seems very pampered where as refuge staff have old computers, desks, and vehicles. 4.) We need resources to improve outreach and education. 5.) We need to decentralize and put RO staff into field positions where they can be of best use. 6.) This agency is still very much a 'good old boy' network. They really need to encourage diverse thinkers. Right now those people are criticized and penalized. Purchasing: Do you know that refuge managers can not spend more than \$2,000 for maintenance improvements without getting approval from RO contracting and General services?! We can not repair vehicles or buy items over \$2,500 without approval..."