

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release April 22, 1973

Carroll 202/343-5634

U.S.-U.S.S.R. DRAFTING TREATY ON MIGRATORY BIRDS; OTHER COOPERATIVE WILDLIFE PROGRAMS PLANNED

Spencer Smith, director of the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service, said today that the United States and Soviet Union are drafting a treaty for the protection of migratory birds and this year will begin several other cooperative wildlife programs.

Wildlife conservation is one of 11 specific areas designated to implement the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection, signed in Moscow by President Richard Nixon and Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet N. V. Podgorny on May 23, 1972.

Dr. Joseph P. Linduska of the Fish and Wildlife Service, who headed an American team of wildlife experts who met with their Soviet counterparts in Moscow in February, said that he expects the draft treaty will be discussed at the next U.S.-Soviet wildlife session in Washington in September.

"The treaty should engage the Soviets more actively in studies of bird migration patterns and population levels," Dr. Linduska said. Indicating that eventually the two countries may agree on common regulatory measures for certain species, he added: "The meetings revealed to us that waterfowl in the United States and Soviet Union face many of the same problems, especially from drainage of nesting areas and other land use changes."

Dr. Linduska announced that the following other cooperative programs to be conducted in 1973 were agreed on in the Moscow meetings:

** Soviet scientists will accompany Dr. Robert W. Elsner of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in a study of the biological adaptation of northern marine mammals in the Bering Sea.

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** Scott McVay of the Environmental Defense Fund will head a joint team during studies of the bowhead whale which resides only in Arctic waters. Scientists will hope to develop a census technique to index population size and trends for this species, now one of the rarest of the great whales. Bowheads, although protected from commercial whaling, remain important to the subsistence economy of several Siberian villages and to Eskimos in Alaska. Logistical support will be supplied by the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory at Point Barrow.

** Soviet scientists will join Dr. William Sladen of Johns Hopkins University this summer in his studies of the migration and ecology of northern swans through use of banding, colored neck collars, and radio telemetry.

In addition to these studies, Dr. Linduska said that the two countries agreed to a "formal exchange" of information on endangered species.

He indicated that consideration will be given to the need for additional research and regulatory measures regarding polar bears at the September meeting of the International Congress of Game Biologists at Stockholm. Discussion of a possible exchange of personnel to study wolves will also take place at that session.

"The United States and Soviet Union have much to learn from each other," Dr. Linduska said. He was impressed with the work underway at the Voronezh and Oka-Terrace Preserves which the American team visited during their stay in the Soviet Union. The visit to Voronezh, 400 miles southeast of Moscow, was the first by any American since its establishment in 1924.

"In their work with beaver on this 87 thousand acre area, the Soviets exhibited a high degree of competence in wildlife husbandry," Dr. Linduska said. "Their use of tranquilizers to immobilize wildlife for purposes of study and transplant, also is highly refined."

The American group witnessed a tranquilizing demonstration on European moose and red deer (similar to American elk) at Voronezh, and the live-trapping of wild boar.

At Oka-Terrace, 100 miles southwest of Moscow, they spent the day reviewing breeding experiments underway with the once nearly-extinct European bison.

On both areas, the United States team observed many nest boxes for songbirds and flying squirrels. Biological control agents to suppress forest insects were widely employed.

"There is evidence that the Soviets are ardent outdoorsmen," Dr. Linduska said, observing that a statistic of 30 million to 35 million Russian hunters is about double the American figure.