

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

For Release October 15, 1973

Carroll 202/343-5634

SOVIET ENVIRONMENTAL SPECIALISTS TO VISIT U.S.

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton announced today that a group of high-ranking Soviet environmental specialists will get a first-hand look at U.S. wildlife and plant conservation practices during a two-week (October 14-28) tour of American parks, forests, and wildlife refuges. The tour will be hosted by the Interior Department. The Soviets are visiting this country under the 1972 joint U.S.-U.S.S.R. environmental protection agreement.

Secretary Morton said: "Our meetings with Soviet scientists this year on a wide range of environmental issues have helped us to identify areas of concern where the shared knowledge and resources of the two countries can be applied most effectively in the search for solutions to mutual environmental problems. We hope this particular visit will lead to the rapid establishment of cooperative research and management programs to protect wildlife such as polar bears, wolves, walruses, and migratory birds that are common to the far northern areas of both countries."

The Soviets' itinerary includes the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Maryland (endangered species research); Assateague Island National Seashore and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (seashore and waterfowl protection); Pawnee National Grasslands, Colorado (short-grass prairie land); Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado (alpine tundra ecology, wildlife

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habitat management, park administration); Fraser Experimental Forest, Colorado (watershed research); Dinosaur National Monument, Colorado and Utah; and Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, Utah.

During their visit the Soviet team will be accompanied by a group of U.S. wildlife experts representing both the government and private organizations. The American team will be headed by E. U. Curtis Bohlen, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

Throughout the trip the Soviets and their American counterparts will discuss specific projects focusing on three major areas of concern: tundra ecosystems, wildlife conservation, and the organization and administration of nature preserves, wildlife refuges, and parks.

High on the list of specific projects which might be initiated in the near future are the transfer of a nucleus herd of muskox from Alaska to the Soviet Union, where they existed during the Ice Age, and the capture of Russian ferrets to be used by U.S. researchers in propagation experiments involving our own highly endangered black-footed ferret.

Other topics under consideration as possible cooperative projects include:

- Permafrost zone management, protection, and research
- Population census of polar bears
- Effects of wildfire and fire control methods on tundra ecosystems
- Caribou productivity and ecology
- Selection and establishment of preserves representing major tundra areas as sites for joint research
- Reindeer husbandry
- Effects of air pollution on lichens
- Study of diseases affecting tundra wildlife.

The conservation of wildlife, tundra ecosystems, and parks comprise one of the 16 major areas identified for joint study in the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection signed in Moscow by President Richard Nixon and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet N. V. Podgorny on May 23, 1972.