

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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PUBLIC COMMENTS SOUGHT ON FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The opinions of American citizens as to how one of the Nation's invaluable assets--the National Wildlife Refuge System--should be managed in the next 10 to 15 years were requested today by Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Greenwalt announced the availability of a comprehensive study of the System and asked that the public carefully and thoughtfully review it. The document contains 26 recommendations by a specially appointed task force on the management of the System's 386 wildlife refuges as well as the Director's comments on each of those recommendations. The task force membership consisted of 10 persons from private and public organizations representing a variety of views on wildlife issues.

"The future course of refuge management," he said, "is critical to the welfare of fish and wildlife as well as to the ultimate beneficiaries of this national heritage, the American people.

"The stakes--the people's resources--are high, and the public should take full advantage of this opportunity to make their own feelings known.

"I am keenly interested in obtaining public commentary and input on the recommendations of the task force and, more particularly, on my comments on the recommendations of the group, with which I do not always agree."

(over)

After studying public comments that he receives, Greenwalt said that he will modify or change his comments as appropriate and submit final recommendations for Interior's approval.

Copies of the task force study, which was undertaken at the request of Robert L. Herbst, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, can be obtained by writing the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240. Comments should be sent to the same address, and all those received through May 15 will be considered in the Director's final recommendations.

A notice of availability of the report was published in the March 29, 1978, Federal Register.

Greenwalt considers the report one of the most significant events in the long history of the management of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The 26 recommendations cover every aspect of the System: its mission, size, wildlife objectives and policies, management, public use, research, administration, and organization. The report and its recommendations are designed to help make decisions about the future of the System that will directly affect fish and wildlife and people for many years.

"Determinations about the future of this valuable national asset are important," Greenwalt said, "and they are precisely the kinds of decisions about which the public should be concerned and in which the public should participate.

"It is particularly critical that both the task force product and my commentary be considered; in many cases both are in agreement; in most cases I offer clarifying commentary; in some instances I do not agree with the recommendations of the task force.

"The public should be aware of the differences and, most especially, aware of my proposed recommendations and my reasons for making those recommendations."

When final recommendations are approved, they and a summary of the public comments received will be published.