

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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LANDMARK LEGISLATION SIGNED FOR NONGAME FISH AND WILDLIFE; URBAN AREAS EXPECTED TO BENEFIT

Calling it "the most important wildlife conservation measure in recent years," Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said today that the new Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act "closes the last major gap in this country's commitment to conserving our fish and wildlife resources."

The Act was signed into law September 29. It is designed to benefit nongame species that are not ordinarily hunted, fished, or trapped for food, commerce, or sport and to place special emphasis on urban wildlife. The legislation was supported by fish and game agencies from all 50 States and nearly 300 conservation groups.

When funds are appropriated as authorized by the Act, they can be used to reimburse the States for 90 percent of the cost for developing comprehensive wildlife conservation plans. The plans identify significant fish and wildlife populations, their range and distribution, the condition of their habitats, the factors that may adversely affect them, and the actions that should be taken to conserve the species and their habitats. After the comprehensive plans are approved, the law also authorizes Federal cost sharing for conducting approved activities such as research, inventories, law enforcement, and public education.

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Greenwalt said that in calling for statewide conservation "master" plans, the Act "clearly recognizes the need for comprehensive management of all fish and wildlife and their habitats as part of an interrelated environment. It also recognizes the intrinsic value of all species, regardless of their use." Chipmunks, meadowlarks, songbirds, herons, osprey, and cardinals are among the nearly 3,000 nongame vertebrate species in this country that will benefit from the new legislation.

The measure authorizes \$5 million in financial and technical assistance to the States for each of the next four fiscal years, beginning October 1, 1982. The funds are to be apportioned to the States primarily on the basis of population and land area. The District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and the Northern Mariana Islands will receive matching funds on a formula basis.

Because two-thirds of the apportionment will be based on population, the wildlife found in urban areas and suburbs likely will receive special emphasis. A growing number of Americans are spending their leisure time in outdoor recreation such as birdwatching, hiking, and camping, as indicated in a national survey conducted in 1975. The survey showed that the number of days spent observing wildlife was 10 times greater than the total days spent that year attending professional baseball games, NCAA and NFL football games, and horseraces combined.

The nongame Act parallels two similar measures for sport fish and wildlife, the Dingell-Johnson Act of 1950 and the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937. Under these two Acts, \$117 million was apportioned to the States and territories last year from special excise taxes on sports equipment such as sporting arms and ammunition, rods, reels, lures, bait, and certain archery equipment. At present only about 10 percent of these funds are spent to benefit nongame species with most of it going to rural areas. In passing the new Act, Congress noted that these "traditional financing mechanisms are neither adequate nor fully appropriate to meet the conservation needs of nongame fish and wildlife."

Greenwalt said that experience "has shown clearly that the welfare of wild populations can be advanced by wildlife management techniques such as regular monitoring to track changes in populations, research to isolate limiting factors and management to correct those factors." He also pointed out that it would cost far less to conserve healthy populations than to bring them back from the brink of extinction, noting that 86 percent of the vertebrate species now listed as endangered or threatened are considered nongame.

The new legislation does not apply to endangered or threatened species, marine mammals or feral animals.

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