



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ISSUES REPORT ON CONTAMINANTS ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

A preliminary survey has identified contaminant problems on 10 of the nation's 431 wildlife refuges and indicated 74 refuges where in-depth study is required because of suspected or potential contaminant problems.

"The survey was made to better define the presence of potentially harmful contaminants affecting national wildlife refuges," said William P. Horn, Interior Department Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "It is based on information from refuge managers and Service contaminant specialists, and represents the best available information on contaminants affecting refuges. We will now develop action plans to address the problems defined in the report."

The Fish and Wildlife Service's survey was coordinated with a recent Interior Department Task Group on Irrigation Drainage, which has been looking into environmental effects associated with irrigation drainage practices in the West. The report includes information used by the task group, but also contains information on contaminant issues not associated with irrigation drainwater.

The report, entitled "Preliminary Survey of Contaminant Issues of Concern on National Wildlife Refuges," describes contaminants believed to have a persistent, adverse impact on refuge habitats, animal populations, or human health and safety, or that may violate federal or state laws, local ordinances, or international treaties. An appendix summarizes the nature of the issue at each refuge and the studies or remedial actions that have already been undertaken.

Most contaminants identified in the report come from agricultural, industrial, or municipal activities outside the refuges and are carried to the refuges by either natural or man-made water systems. Examples of contaminants identified include pesticides, PCB's, asbestos, selenium from irrigation drainage, and heavy metals such as mercury.

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The report identifies 77 existing or potential contaminant problems affecting a total of 84 refuges. The contaminant issues are classified according to the nature of the evidence about them and the actions needed to investigate and resolve them. Some refuges have more than one contaminant issue and thus are included in more than one of the following categories.

- Category A -- 10 contaminant problems affecting 10 refuges. Included in this category are sites where evidence indicates a problem exists requiring corrective action. Refuges in Category A are Wheeler, Alabama (industrial wastes -- DDT); Kenai, Alaska (oil and gas activities -- PCB's); Kesterson, California (agricultural drainwater -- selenium and other trace elements); Seal Beach, California (military activities -- dumpsites); Johnston Atoll, Hawaii (military activities -- nerve and mustard gas, dioxin, plutonium); Crab Orchard, Illinois (industrial wastes -- PCB's); Great Swamp, New Jersey (asbestos dump); Ninigret, Rhode Island (military dumpsites); Eastern Shore of Virginia, Virginia (asbestos insulation in refuge buildings); Fisherman Island, Virginia (military activities -- DDT).
- Category B -- 27 contaminant issues potentially affecting 30 refuges. Included in this category are areas where on-site evidence indicates reason for concern, but more in-depth monitoring and study are needed to better define environmental impacts.
- Category C -- 40 contaminant issues potentially affecting 51 refuges. Category C includes refuges where there is no direct evidence that contaminants are present, but adjacent land use practices such as heavy pesticide use, previous industrial uses such as waste dumping, or comparison to other areas that have contaminant problems may lead a refuge manager to suspect contamination. Additional monitoring is needed for Category C areas.

In addition to these areas, some contaminant issues initially identified were found not to warrant inclusion in the report, either because they had been resolved or did not have persistent adverse impacts. These "Category D" sites are not listed in the report. Some may require monitoring, however, to assure that an apparently benign situation does not become a problem.

The Fish and Wildlife Service will prepare plans outlining response strategies for each of the contaminant issues identified and set priorities for follow-up actions, based on such things as the source, nature, and extent of the contamination. In most cases, a coordinated effort involving local, regional, state, and federal entities will be needed to remedy the contaminant issues. The Service plans to seek cooperation from those responsible for the contaminants in funding the remedial actions.

As research and monitoring efforts proceed, the classification of areas in the report may change. Some contaminant issues in Categories B and C may be found to warrant inclusion in Category A, while others may be found to be insignificant and be removed from the list. Other issues not now apparent may surface and be added to the list.

Copies of the report are available by writing to the Director (RF), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Room 2024, Washington, D.C. 20240, or calling 202-343-4047.