



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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### REVIEW FINDS MOST USES COMPATIBLE ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

The overwhelming majority of all secondary uses occurring on national wildlife refuges (birdwatching, fishing, environmental education, and economic uses such as grazing) are considered compatible with refuge purposes, according to John Turner, director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This finding was the result of an extensive internal review conducted after a 1989 General Accounting Office (GAO) report criticized the Service for allowing detrimental uses to take place on refuge system lands.

In testimony before the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries March 21, Turner said the Service found approximately 6,300 recreational and economic activities taking place on the 478 refuge units.

About 2 percent of the uses were reported as "incompatible," a legal standard under which activities should not be permitted, and only about 1 percent are under the Fish and Wildlife Service's jurisdiction to control.

While calling any number of incompatible uses a cause for concern, Turner said, "I am encouraged that the vast majority of uses we've identified are considered compatible.

"The review process has helped give us a good picture of the activities taking place on individual refuges," Turner said. "The Service is taking steps to ensure that every use considered incompatible is eliminated, or altered in order to make it compatible." He added the Service's survey of secondary uses will be repeated in 2 years to monitor progress, and every 5 years thereafter.

(over)

Turner reported that 24 of the uses identified as incompatible have already been resolved, 17 are scheduled to be resolved by the end of 1991, and 27 will be resolved as contracts or other agreements expire. In seven cases, the solutions have been initiated but are to be phased in over several years, and four require negotiations with states due to shared jurisdiction.

"I believe the Service will emerge from this process with the refuge system having a better handle on secondary uses. And built-in mechanisms will ensure it stays that way," Turner said.

The National Wildlife Refuge System, established specifically for wildlife, totals more than 90 million acres. The purpose of most refuges is waterfowl management and production, while others provide habitat for endangered species, large mammals, or other types of wildlife.

By law, secondary uses within the Service's jurisdiction are permitted only when compatible with the purpose for which the refuge was established. In addition, that use must be consistent with the Refuge System Administration Act and other applicable laws; with refuge system goals, objectives, rules, and regulations; and with individual refuge goals and objectives.

Turner explained the Service's review also addressed those uses described as "harmful," although there is no legal or regulatory definition for the term. The review found that of approximately 760 uses called "harmful" by the study, 74 percent were not within the jurisdiction of the Fish and Wildlife Service to control. Those include uses associated with unacquired landowner rights, airspace use, rights-of-way, and use of navigable waters. The Service is currently working with other Federal, state, and local agencies to address these issues through cooperative efforts.

Most uses called "harmful" and within Service jurisdiction were identified as those associated with numbers of people engaged in site-specific recreational activities. Turner said better public use management, aimed at relocating or rescheduling activities, may help alleviate the problem of "too many people being in one place at one time." Specific actions to address each of these uses is under way.