



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ADOPTS NATIVE AMERICAN POLICY

The Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is adopting a policy aimed at fostering partnerships with Native American governments in the management of fish and wildlife resources.

The policy was signed by Service Director Mollie Beattie on June 28th. In announcing the policy, Beattie cited the mutual interests of Native American governments and the agency she heads.

"The Fish and Wildlife Service and the tribes have a long history of working together," Beattie said. "Adoption of this policy signals our determination to forge even stronger partnerships with Native Americans to help conserve and restore fish and wildlife and the ecosystems that support them."

Native Americans control over 50 million acres on reservations and are involved in managing an additional 50 million acres of ceded territories. These lands offer important habitat for a wide variety of fish and wildlife species such as bald eagles, waterfowl, salmon, bighorn sheep, neotropical migrant birds, and many others.

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The document calls for the Service to work with Native American Tribes in a government-to-government relationship through improved communication, mutual sharing of technical expertise, and respecting and utilizing the traditional knowledge and unique perspective of Native Americans as part of the agency's fish and wildlife management efforts.

The policy specifies increased consultation with Native American governments concerning fish and wildlife management and fosters improved channels of communication among the Service, Native American governments, as well as other federal, state and local agencies, and others.

In addition to fish and wildlife management concerns, the policy also addresses the role of fish and wildlife in the culture and religious practices of Native Americans. The Service is committed to involving Native American governments in all Service actions that may affect their cultural or religious interests, such as archeological sites or possession of parts of protected animals traditionally used in ceremonial or religious activities.

The document also calls for a heightened degree of cooperation related to fish and wildlife law enforcement, evaluation of law enforcement capability, and coordination of investigations into illegal wildlife activities.

In conclusion, Beattie added, "Within the Fish and Wildlife Service, we view Native Americans as key partners as we move toward a more ecosystem-oriented approach to the conservation challenges of the next century."