



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240

DIRECTOR'S ORDER NO. 132

Subject: National Wildlife Refuge System Mission, Goals, and Purposes

Sec. 1 What is the purpose of this Order? This Order reiterates the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, how it relates to the mission of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and explains the relationship of the System mission and goals, and the purpose(s) of each unit of the System. This Order provides goals for the System and guidance for identifying or determining the purpose(s) of each unit within the System. This Order also provides guidance on the use of goals and purposes in the administration and management of the System.

Sec. 2 What is the scope of this Order? This Order applies to all units of the System. For purposes of this Order, a unit means all lands, waters, and interests therein that we administer as wildlife refuges, wildlife ranges, wildlife management areas, waterfowl production areas, coordination areas and other areas for the protection and conservation of fish and wildlife including those threatened with extinction as determined in writing by the Director or so directed by Executive or Secretarial Order.

Sec. 3 How do the System mission, goals, and unit purpose(s) relate to each other? Collectively, the System mission, goals, and unit purpose(s) define our duty for the administration and management of any unit of the System. Ideally, we view the System mission, goals, and unit purpose(s) as symbiotic; however, we give priority to achieving a unit's purpose(s) when conflicts with the System mission or a specific goal exist. Unit purposes form the foundation for developing goals and objectives for units during Comprehensive Conservation Plan preparation, and provide the basis for determining the appropriateness and compatibility of existing and proposed uses on units

Sec. 4 What is the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System? The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (NWRSA-1966), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (NWRSA-1997), states: "The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."

Sec. 5 How does the mission of the System relate to the mission of the Service? The mission of the Service, as set forth in National Policy Issuance 99-01, is ". . . working with others, to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people." To accomplish this mission, there is a clear need for a network of lands and waters representing the diversity of landscapes and ecosystems of the United States dedicated to the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants. While the mission of the System and purposes of individual units are paramount, we recognize that the System contributes a vital component to the Service mission.

Sec. 6 What are the goals of the System? The following goals guide the administration, management, and growth of the System:

a. *To fulfill our statutory duty to achieve refuge purpose(s) and further the System mission.* Congress entrusts the Service with the stewardship of America's National Wildlife Refuge System. Our first obligation in meeting that trust is the nondiscretionary duty to fulfill refuge purpose(s). We may not discard that obligation in pursuit of other objectives. We may, in order to fulfill the broader System mission and to further the goals below, manage a refuge to achieve additional wildlife conservation purposes and needs, unforeseen, unknown, or resulting from circumstances unanticipated at the time of refuge establishment. These efforts will be additive to the achievement of refuge purpose(s), which is our first and highest obligation.

b. *Conserve, restore where appropriate, and enhance all species of fish, wildlife, and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.* Threatened and endangered species are those listed as such by the Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service. As we manage to achieve unit purposes, we are mindful of our obligations under section 2(c)(1) of the Endangered Species Act; and we strive to be a model for other Federal land managing agencies in fulfilling that obligation. We protect and manage candidate and proposed species to enhance their status and help preclude the need for listing. Per Service policy [see section 1.2(C) of the Service's Section 7 Consultation Handbook, March 1998], we will consult or confer with Service Endangered Species staff on any actions authorized, funded, or carried out on System units that may affect listed, proposed, or candidate species or designated or proposed critical habitat.

c. *Perpetuate migratory bird, interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations.* We strive to meet the needs of all migratory birds in our habitat strategies, especially those species that are rare, declining, or tied directly to a unit's purpose(s). We contribute to such efforts as the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, and continue to recognize the System's role in the perpetuation of the continent's waterfowl resource. There are more than 200 refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas established for the purpose of waterfowl or migratory bird conservation. We emphasize the conservation and management of those marine mammals for which the Service has primary management authority, including polar bears, walruses, sea otters, manatees, and dugongs, as well as the conservation of any marine mammal using System lands or waters. We emphasize the conservation and management of those fish populations using System waters and whose life-cycle movements cross international, State, or tribal boundaries. Examples include anadromous species of salmon and free-roaming species endemic to large river systems, such as paddlefish and sturgeon.

d. *Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants.* We sustain all native species of animals and plants that inhabit units of the System through our efforts to maintain the biological diversity, biological integrity, and environmental health of each unit. This does not preclude the consumptive use of some species when compatible with a unit's purpose(s) and the System mission, or the population management of some species to help achieve a unit's purpose(s). Some units were established primarily to protect populations of certain animal species that have a unique historic and cultural legacy in

North America. We continue to emphasize the conservation of those native species tied directly to the establishment purpose(s) of units.

e. Conserve and restore, where appropriate, representative ecosystems of the United States, including the ecological processes characteristic of those ecosystems. Through our management and acquisition efforts, we assist States, tribes, other agencies, and conservation groups in preserving those ecosystems, plant communities, wetlands of national or international significance, and/or landscapes that are unique, rare, declining, or under-represented in existing conservation lands. We use existing and emerging classification systems that identify such ecosystems and/or resources to guide our preservation, restoration, and acquisition efforts. We care for our special designation lands, such as wilderness, natural areas, wild and scenic rivers, national monuments, and national natural landmarks, and, where appropriate, expand these designations on existing and new units. We strive to establish and maintain a network of biological reserves to ensure preservation and genetic exchange of our Nation's diverse natural heritage in partnership with other Federal land management agencies, States, conservation organizations, and members of the public participating on a voluntary basis.

f. To foster understanding and instill appreciation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their conservation, by providing the public with safe, high-quality, and compatible wildlife-dependent public use. Such use includes hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. We recognize that people gain a higher awareness of and appreciation for the value of fish and wildlife conservation in part by providing opportunities for them to engage in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation. This higher awareness and appreciation ultimately contribute to the fundamental mission of the System. Thus, we facilitate opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation that are compatible with a unit's purpose(s) and the System mission. Our interpretive and education programs also include historic and cultural resources found on units. We actively seek partnerships for our public use programs when a lack of funds or staff limit implementation.

Sec. 7 How do these goals relate to management priorities? The NWRSA-1966, as amended, sets forth the following priority for management activities: (1) wildlife; (2) wildlife-dependent recreational uses; and (3) other uses. Thus, goals dealing with fish, wildlife, and plants, and the habitat or ecosystems on which they depend, take priority over wildlife-dependent uses or any other uses of System lands. Wildlife-dependent recreation uses, in turn, take priority over those uses that are not wildlife dependent. Each unit contributes to one or more of the goals of the System, depending on the purpose(s) of the unit, a unit's geographic and ecological setting, and the unique characteristics, potential, or limitations of each unit.

Sec. 8 How will we use these goals of the System? These goals help step down the System mission and statements on System management as written in the NWRSA-1997, as amended. Collectively, these goals articulate the foundation for our stewardship of the System and define the unique niche it occupies among the various Federal land systems. We consider these goals in: developing wildlife population and habitat goals and objectives

at the System, regional, ecosystem, and unit level; providing a frame of reference for Comprehensive Conservation Plans; guiding the land acquisition decision-making process; assisting managers in applying sound professional judgment to their decisions while carrying out the purpose(s) of their units and in determining whether proposed uses are appropriate and compatible; and guiding development of other policies on System administration and management.

Sec. 9 What is meant by “unit purpose?” Unit purpose refers to the justification for the establishment of a unit of the System as a place owned by the American people and cared for on their behalf. The NWRSA-1966, as amended, defines “purposes of the refuge” as the “purposes specified in or derived from the law, proclamation, executive order, agreement, public land order, donation document, or administrative memorandum establishing, authorizing, or expanding a refuge, refuge unit, or refuge subunit.”

Sec. 10 Why are unit purposes important? Purposes define the essential objective of our refuge stewardship. They constitute a nondiscretionary obligation as the legislative, legal, and administrative foundations for the administration and management of a unit of the System. This includes planning, setting unit goals and objectives, and authorization of public uses, which must be shown to be appropriate and compatible with the purpose(s) of a unit and the System mission before we allow them.

Sec. 11 What are some examples of purposes? Units that we acquire under the authority of general conservation laws take on the purpose of the law. Examples of such laws include the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act, and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Executive Orders and refuge-specific legislation generally declare the purpose(s) of the unit, sometimes broadly (e.g., a preserve and breeding ground for native birds) and sometimes very specifically (e.g., to protect and preserve in the national interest the Key deer and other wildlife resources in the Florida Keys).

Sec. 12 Where can you find the purpose(s) of each unit of the System? The publication “Purposes for Refuges of the National Wildlife Refuge System” contains the official purpose(s) for each unit. We update this publication annually to include new additions to the System, and you can find it by using the “Search - databases” on the System web server at <http://refuges.fws.gov>.

Sec. 13 If a unit has multiple purposes, do some purposes take priority over others? Unless the establishing law, order, or other document indicates otherwise, purposes dealing with the conservation, management, and restoration of fish, wildlife, and plants, and the habitats on which they depend take precedence over other purposes in the management and administration of any unit. Where a refuge has multiple purposes related to fish, wildlife, and plant conservation, the more specific purpose will take precedence in instances of conflict. Designated wilderness assumes the purposes of the Wilderness Act of 1964 in addition and equal to other unit purposes, unless otherwise specified in the wilderness designation.

Sec. 14 How does the purpose(s) associated with acquiring new lands for existing units relate to the original purpose(s) of the existing units? When we acquire an addition to a unit under an authority different from the authority used to establish the original unit, the addition also takes on the purpose(s) of the original unit, but the original unit does not take on the purpose(s) of the addition.

Sec. 15 How does the Wilderness Act affect a unit's purpose? The purposes of the Wilderness Act become additional and equal purposes of units with designated wilderness, but apply only to those areas so designated. The purposes of the Wilderness Act include both the preservation of wilderness condition and character, and the use and enjoyment of wilderness.

Sec. 16 What is the process for determining purposes of units? The purpose(s) of existing units may be found as described in section 13, above. We will use the decision process outlined in Exhibit 1 to determine the purpose(s) of a unit. Apply this process to all System acquisitions, including excess military lands, land exchanges, or condemnations by focusing on the acquisition authority for the particular property. This process takes into account those rare cases where acquisition authority provides a vague purpose. Use this process for each parcel or group of parcels included under different acquisition authorities, until you determine the purpose for each authority.

Sec. 17 What is the effective date of this Order? This Order is effective immediately. It will expire on March 31, 2002, unless amended, superseded, or revoked. We will include the provisions of this Order in Part 601 of the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.



DIRECTOR

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Date: