

Pain at the Pump

By H. Dale Hall

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With gasoline running about \$4 a gallon, Byron Fortier of the Southeast Louisiana Refuge Complex wondered why he hadn't noticed any fewer people applying for RV pads in exchange for volunteer work at the national wildlife refuge – until one visitor gave away the reason. “We're all looking for a beautiful place to stay for a while. These days, we can't afford to drive around.”

National wildlife refuges, not unlike the RV community, are feeling the fuel pinch. Whether it's operating heavy equipment for maintenance or building a new boardwalk, refuge managers are watching fuel costs take a hefty bite out of their plans. And it could have been worse if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had not already been working on energy conservation for years.

Last fiscal year alone, 70 field stations implemented remarkable energy efficiency retrofits and renewable energy projects. Nine Service facilities – eight of them on national wildlife refuges – have been designated as Federal Energy Saver Showcases. One of the Showcase winners, Tualatin National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon won the Service's Environmental Leadership Award and now reserves three parking spaces for visitors driving hybrid cars.

In Montana, the 1.1 million-acre Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge launched its environmental management system years ago, addressing everything from upgrading fleet fuel efficiency to creating on-site power generation. And recently, the new administrative and visitor facility at the Nulhegan Division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in New England became the first Service facility to receive national ENERGY STAR designation.

We're making progress, but the ambitious new targets established under the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 will require substantial investment. Like other federal agencies, the Service is to reduce its energy use by 30 percent by 2015. That level of energy reduction will save some \$27 million through fiscal year 2015 – but that goal may cost at least \$39 million to reach. However, over the long haul, this investment will give benefits for the Service and the resources we're working to protect.

We're committed to the concepts and mission of the Act. And as conservationists, we can view responsible energy management as an extension of our work to sustain the Nation's natural resources for tomorrow's generations. As always, refuges are leading a way to that brighter future. So let's be inspired by this new direction and innovative spirit as we work toward the goal of energy independence.