

Independent Analysis Finds Refuge System Struggles to Meet Goals

An independent evaluation has found that the Refuge System experienced an 11 percent decline in real purchasing power between FY 2003 and the FY 2008 requested budget. As a result, the Refuge System has been unable to maintain its level of operational activity, according to the report from Management Systems International (MSI), which conducted the evaluation between October 2006 and September 2007.

The report, titled, “An Independent Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Wildlife Refuge System,” rated the Refuge System as “ineffective” in meeting two strategic goals:

- Protect resources and visitors through law enforcement.
- Strategically grow the System.

On a positive note, MSI rated the Refuge System as “highly effective” in one strategic goal: facilitating partnerships and cooperative projects. The consultant specifically pointed to the Refuge System’s work with volunteer and Friends organizations as well as state fish and wildlife agencies. MSI calculated that in 2005 alone, partnerships contributed more than \$50 million to the Refuge System – with more than \$30 million in direct cash contributions.

Among its 11 principle recommendations, MSI advises increasing the number of full-time Refuge System law enforcement officers from the current 200 to 400. While MSI noted that law enforcement training is “sound and improving,” the firm also noted a “critical lack of law enforcement coverage” at most field stations. More than 70 percent of refuge managers indicated they feel law enforcement coverage is “insufficient” at the refuge they manage.

MSI also noted that the rate at which land has been added to the Refuge System had declined “significantly” over the past five years.

For a summary of the 221-page report, go to:

http://www.fws.gov/refuges/policyMakers/pdfs/MSI/NWRS_EvaluationSummaryFINAL_7-15-08_508v.pdf