



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Iowa

## National Wildlife Refuge System Workforce Planning

### Background

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System is the only network of federal lands dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is currently undergoing a nationwide workforce planning effort. This effort is being conducted to help ensure the Refuge System is able to complete its high priority mission activities in the face of relatively flat annual budgets and increasing personnel and operational costs.

### Iowa

National Wildlife Refuge System staff in Iowa manage six national wildlife refuges and one wetland management district. These employees manage approximately 109,000 acres of land and host 612,000 visitors annually.

### Workforce Planning

In order to keep personnel costs from completely absorbing required refuge operational funds, the Region must reduce refuge staff by 20 percent, a total of 71 positions.

To meet this target, the Refuge System staff in Iowa will be reduced by eight positions; from 52 in 2004 to 44 in 2009.

### Reduction in Management Capability and Visitor Services

Due to this reduction in staff, Iowa's refuges and wetland management district will not be able to maintain their current level of fish and wildlife management activities or provide the same level of public use opportunities.

It is estimated that a 15 to 20 percent reduction in performance measures involving habitat management and visitor services will occur as a result of these reductions.

### Personnel Losses

The Region is planning to eliminate these positions through natural attrition, retirement and relocations if needed.

#### Iowa Personnel Losses

**8 positions**

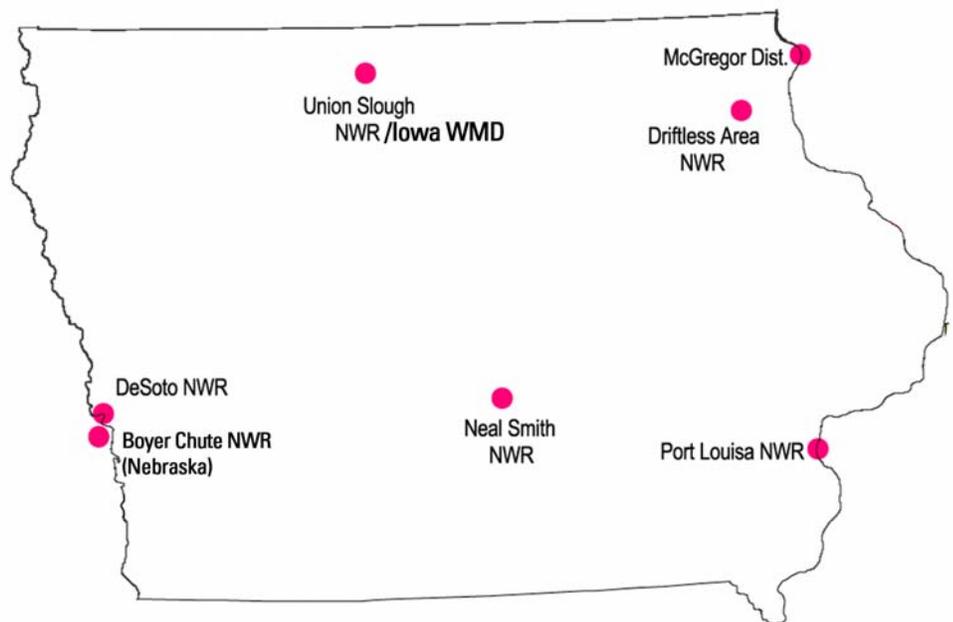
**15% reduction**

3 Manager/Res. Spec.

3 Park Rangers

1 Biological Tech

1 Maintenance Worker



### What This Means on the Ground

Habitat management, visitor services and educational programs across the state will be impacted. Each state, refuge and wetland management district in the Midwest Region is going to feel the effects of these personnel reductions.

### Impacts in Iowa

#### Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge and Iowa Wetland Management

**District:** Activities that are not being completed include the biological monitoring of grassland and wetland habitat, and trust species such as waterfowl populations. Activities that enhance public use and safety, such as boundary marking and sign maintenance, will also decline.

#### DeSoto and Boyer Chute (NE)

**National Wildlife Refuges:** As a result of reduced staff, environmental education, visitor services and habitat management activities will be reduced.

The number of environmental education and interpretive programs will be reduced affecting nearly 2,000 students annually.

Habitat management activities will also be reduced. Invasive species control will be reduced by 50 percent affecting as many as 150 acres. The third year of a multi-refuge shorebird study will be cancelled without additional assistance. Tree removal or production plots for grassland restoration will not be completed. An amphibian and reptile study will not be conducted and refuge geographic information system (GIS) capabilities will be reduced.

#### McGregor District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge:

A vacant maintenance position at the refuge has resulted in diverting staff time from collection of management-relevant biological information to maintenance. Instead of conducting bird die-off surveys related to trematodes, and vegetation surveys in managed moist soil units, the biological technician must do basic refuge maintenance such as mowing, trash pickup, vehicle and equipment servicing, and boat landing upkeep. Our wildlife management specialists have assumed additional facilities maintenance responsibilities resulting in declines in boundary enforcement and habitat restoration.

#### Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge:

De-staffing of this threatened and endangered species refuge will result in the curtailing of on-going habitat management efforts including invasive species research and control. Little to no forest or prairie restoration and management work would occur on the refuge. Implementation of management activities identified in the recently completed comprehensive conservation plan for the refuge, and work on a needed update to a recovery plan for the endangered Pleistocene snail may be delayed.

#### Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge:

The refuge's wildlife refuge specialist position will become vacant in May 2007. If the position is left vacant as anticipated, the refuge projects a 75 percent drop in partnership projects (from 20 agreements per year to five agreements per year), a 25 percent drop in prescribed fire accomplishments (from 40

burns for 4000 acres to 30 burns for 3000 acres) and an 80 percent drop in refuge grassland restoration/management activities (from 150 acres per year to 30 acres per year).

#### Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge:

The refuge is a landscape scale project to restore an example of historic tallgrass prairie and savanna ecosystems that are now globally endangered. In addition to the primary purpose of prairie restoration, the refuge has a mission to educate the public in conservation values and concepts.

With the loss of staff, 250 acres of prairie plantings in 2007 will not occur. Prescribed fire is essential in recovering prairies and savanna. With fewer staff only 1,000 of the 3,000 acres scheduled for treatment will be burned.

Adequate mowing and spraying to control exotic species, including highly invasive plants like Chinese bush clover, will not be possible, resulting in new populations or the rapid expanse of existing populations. Tree removal in preparation for prairie plantings will be decreased and slow the development of habitat for grassland bird species that are of special concern due to their declining populations.

It is estimated that 3,000 fewer students will participate in educational experiences led by refuge staff. Visitors will be offered fewer special programs and maintenance of the visitor center and adjacent outdoor area interpretive exhibits, trails and signs will be reduced.