



Wisconsin

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.

Wisconsin

National Wildlife Refuge System staff in Wisconsin manage eight national wildlife refuges and two wetland management districts. These employees manage approximately 177,000 acres of land and host 800,000 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 Wisconsin will be reduced by 10 positions; from 40 in 2004 to 30 in 2009.

Reduction in Management Capability and Visitor Services

Due to this reduction in staff, Wisconsin's refuges and wetland management districts 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

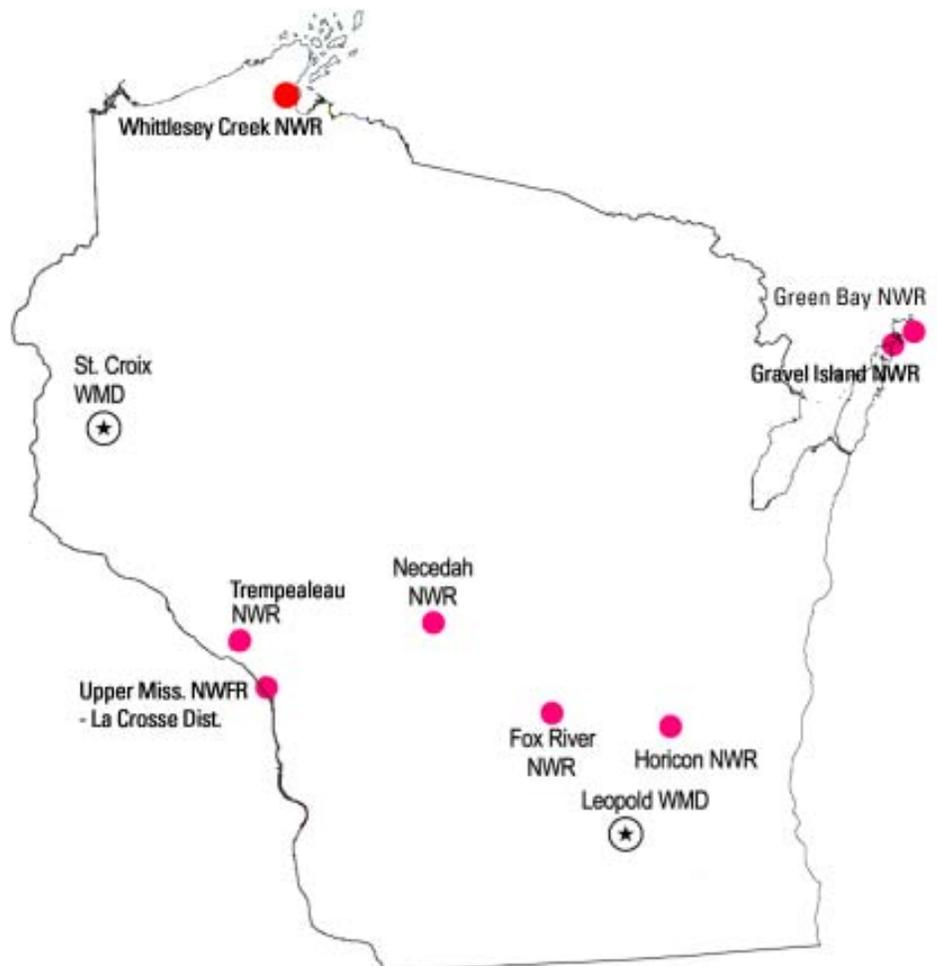
The Region is planning to eliminate these positions through natural attrition, retirement and relocations if needed.

Wisconsin Personnel Losses

10 positions

25% reduction

- 3 Managers/Res. Spec.
- 1 Park Rangers
- 4 Biologists/Bio.Tech.
- 1 Maintenance Worker
- 1 Administrative Staff



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 Wisconsin

Necedah National Wildlife

Refuge: Anticipated staff losses will result in reduced invasive weed control and habitat management which will have a negative impact on the quality of habitat available for wildlife.

Horicon National Wildlife

Refuge: Anticipated staff losses will result in a commensurate reduction of maintenance activities performed on public use facilities on the refuge.

Leopold Wetland Management

District: The loss of the station's administrative position requires other management staff to take on administrative responsibilities. As a result, wildlife management and habitat restoration activities have been reduced.

Whittlesey Creek National

Wildlife Refuge: Anticipated staff losses will result in the curtailment of partnerships to protect the watershed of Whittlesey Creek. Habitat restoration will also see significant reductions.

St. Croix Wetland

Management District: Loss of the District's only maintenance position has greatly reduced the ability to maintain and repair facilities and equipment. Lack of boundary maintenance and sign replacement has created unintended trespass problems. The appearance of the office and buildings reflects a lack of routine care and maintenance. Field equipment breakdowns have become more costly and occur at the worst possible time, reducing efficiency and creating unnecessary safety hazards.

Trempealeau National Wildlife

Refuge: If staff reductions occur, the monitoring, mapping, and control of invasive plants, such as black locust and purple loosestrife, will expand unchecked across Refuge prairies and wetlands. Weekly waterfowl surveys and duck banding will no longer occur. Restoration of additional prairie areas will stop as all resources will be used to maintain existing areas. The public will find existing signs, brochures and structures, but no new materials or facilities will be developed. Staff-led interpretive and environmental education programs will cease, affecting 10,000 students and visitors. The volunteer program will be curtailed with a loss of up to 2,000 volunteer hours. Current assistance to private landowners for wetland and stream restoration will cease.

La Crosse District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge:

Trematodiasis has caused major waterbird mortality on the La Crosse District since 2002. What began as a local problem in Pool 7 has recently expanded further downriver. Coordinating the monitoring, research, abatement and outreach efforts has been handled from the La Crosse District Office with existing staff since the wildlife biologist position is currently, and will remain, vacant. Expansion of the problem, both in the number of birds impacted and area affected, is expected and we will not be able to keep pace with current staff.

This vacancy also forces critical work to be shifted to existing staff. For example, the La Crosse District wildlife refuge specialist currently devotes 1.5 days each week from late September through early December to the Refuge's aerial waterbird survey. The Refuge relies on this survey to meet a variety of important informational needs. A wildlife biologist should be conducting the survey, freeing-up the wildlife refuge specialist for other responsibilities.

The District also has other priorities such as invasive plant control, working with partners to monitor private and public land in the Black River Bottoms for the presence of eastern massasauga rattlesnakes, and developing a management plan for Goose Island in conjunction with partners. These priorities are not being handled efficiently or effectively due to the biologist vacancy.