



# Reporters' Tip Sheet

TOMORROW'S HEADLINES TODAY

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

October-November 2005

## Wildlife Losses Being Assessed Following Hurricane Katrina

The full extent of wildlife losses from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita is still being assessed in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which left a trail of destruction on national wildlife refuges along the Gulf Coast. National wildlife refuges remain closed in Louisiana and Alabama as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service continues to assess damage on its facilities. Already, the estimated toll has topped \$225 million; further assessments are still being undertaken. Combined with flooding in May and Hurricane Dennis in July, storm damage to the National Wildlife Refuge System in 2005 has topped \$300 million.

Even in the face of personal loss, Service employees brought their expertise to aid those devastated by Katrina and Rita. In response to Hurricane Katrina, the Service established an Incident Command Post, which provided housing for 100 Red Cross volunteers and 50 FEMA workers as well as hot meals and showers for National Guardsmen, local law enforcement and fire personnel, staff and patients from the Louisiana Heart Hospital, and others engaged in search and rescue.

By the time the ICP was demobilized on September 28, the Service had provided more than 20,400 meals. In Louisiana alone, work crews opened access to the Louisiana Heart Hospital and cleared more than 14 miles of roads, 318 driveways and 7.5 miles of canal and drainage ditches, disposed of 106 truckloads of debris, and cleared 11 miles of Wildland Urban Interface fire breaks.

Significant issues exist for wildlife and endangered species in Louisiana and Mississippi. Because of reduced habitat, animals were forced onto high ground such as levees and berms. Roadway accidents are increasingly a problem.

*See Katrina, page 2*



*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Heavy equipment operators clear a passage to SE La. Complex Headquarters following Hurricane Katrina. Photo by Mark Tom MacKenzie/USFWS*

## Rediscovery and Recovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker

Learn more about the fascinating efforts to recover this magnificent bird. In April 2005, the Department of the Interior, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, The Nature Conservancy, and other partners announced the extraordinary rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker at Cache River National Wildlife Refuge with sound recordings captured at Whit River National Wildlife Refuge, Arkansas.

Like looking for a needle in a haystack, the next phase of the search will involve

countless challenges, from priority setting, technology, and countless hours in difficult field conditions. This unique partnership includes more than 30 nongovernmental organizations, universities, federal and state agencies focused on the positive outcome for finding more of these rare birds and establishing a recovery strategy to bring it back from the brink of extinction.

For more information, contact: Tom MacKenzie, (404) 679-7291.

# Windpower and Birds

Windpower's environment-friendly technology makes it an attractive renewable energy resource. However, windpower projects can be hazardous to wildlife. Birds and bats are killed or injured when they collide with windtowers and blades. Windpower project construction also may destroy important wildlife habitat or affect wildlife during breeding, feeding or migration.

The best place for a windpower project is often in an area that is equally attractive to migrating birds. The season and weather conditions affect when and where the migratory path will go. Birds and bats may converge along distinct landforms that are either barriers or aids to migration. Some birds congregate along the shore of large water bodies as they migrate. Some songbirds and soaring birds, like eagles and hawks, migrate along Appalachian Mountain ridge lines. Thermal updrafts along the ridges provide lift, allowing the birds to conserve energy. Inclement weather often forces birds to fly lower than usual, where they can collide with human-made structures. Fighting storms or coping with obstacles causes an increase in energy expenditure, reducing the birds' lifespan and ability to reproduce.

Contact Diana Weaver, Northeast Region Public Affairs, 413-253-8329.

## *Katrina*, from page 1

Refuges in the southeast were still cleaning up from Hurricane Dennis in July and Hurricane Ivan the year before when Katrina and Rita barreled over them. Cleanup of more than 170 acres of wildlife habitat began in late July on Bon Secour Refuge in Alabama, slammed by Hurricane Ivan in September 2004. A public ceremony was being readied to celebrate restoration when Bon Secour, whose name means "safe harbor," was hit by Hurricane Katrina. The refuge is again temporarily closed.

For more information, contact the Southeast Regional Office of External Affairs, (404) 679-7287.



USFWS photo

## The Many Economic Benefits of Wildlife Refuges

The National Wildlife Refuge System is a major economic engine even as it conserves wildlife and habitat and offers some of the nation's more alluring recreational opportunities. Those benefits were revealed in *Banking on Nature 2004: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation*, released by Interior Secretary Gale Norton and Travel Industry Association of American President Roger Dow on October 6.

The 40 million annual visitors to the National Wildlife Refuge System contributed \$1.4 billion in total economic activity during the 2004 fiscal year. According to *Banking on Nature 2004*, visitation to national wildlife refuges created almost 24,000 private sector jobs and produced about \$454 million in employment income. Additionally, recreational spending on refuges generated nearly \$151 million in tax revenue at the local, county, state and federal level.

The report provides specific economic information on 93 national wildlife refuges. Regionally, the Southeast led the Refuge System in economic impact. With nearly 11 million visitors last year, national wildlife refuges in the Southeast created more than \$451 million in economic activity and more than 8,500 jobs.

The report also shows a considerable "consumer surplus" of more than \$1 billion in 2004. Consumer surplus is a measure of how much more people are willing to pay for recreation than it actually costs them.

For a copy of the report or to find more information on the National Wildlife Refuge System, visit <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>.

# Mark Chase Named New Refuge Law Enforcement Chief

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has named Mark Chase, a 20-year Service veteran, to head its Division of Refuge Law Enforcement. Chase, who reported to his new post in September, will lead more than 470 full-time and dual-function refuge officers on the 545-unit National Wildlife Refuge System.

Chase will head efforts to enforce laws concerning not only wildlife and conservation, but also border security and drug trafficking and cultivation on national wildlife refuges. He will also be responsible for assuring the safety and security of refuge visitors.

Chase was first commissioned as a U.S. Refuge Officer in 1988 after completing Basic Police Training at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia. Chase has also held a variety of posts on wildlife refuges in Alaska, Arizona, Oklahoma and Texas. Most recently, Chase was the Project Leader for the Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District in Minnesota.

Chase will implement the Refuge System's first law enforcement deployment model, developed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). It uses workload and hazard analyses to develop recommended staffing levels. This is the first deployment model the IACP has developed for a federal land management agency.

For more information, contact Jerry Olmsted, Office of Refuge Law Enforcement, (703) 358-1725.



*Photo by Jesse Achtenberg/USFWS*

## The Best Bison Genes Are in Sullys Hill, North Dakota

Is there such a thing as a "purebred" bison herd? Though that may be impossible to authenticate, preliminary analysis has found that the bison herd at Sullys Hill National Game Preserve in North Dakota may be closer to that pure standard than any other herd within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Recent media interest in genetically pure bison has focused on bison with no traces of cattle in their bloodline. The bison herd at Sullys Hill National Game Preserve does not have any detectable hybridization, according to Cami Dixon, biologist at nearby Devils Lake Wetland Management District.

In 1904, President Teddy Roosevelt established the game preserve to provide breeding grounds for wild animals and birds. Bison were reintroduced to Sullys Hill in 1918 from the Portland City Park in Oregon. At that time, the country was concerned about the disappearance of the American bison.

The bison now at the game preserve are descendants of those original herds. The herd averages between 30 and 35 bison, and has held steadily at those numbers for several decades. Today's emphasis on "purebred" bison is a recent, renewed interest. Over the years, bison were sometimes crossed purposely and accidentally with cattle. Efforts are currently being taken to identify the level of this hybridization of the Fish and Wildlife Service herds. Additional research is underway to determine the genetic impacts of the limited past introductions of other bison into the Sully's Hill bison herd.

For more information, contact Cami Dixon, Devils Lake Wetland Management & Complex, (701) 662-8611, ext. 334.

## Energy Award-Winning Rhode Island Refuge Visitor Center Opens

The Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters and Kettle Pond Visitor Center, which has been named a Federal Energy Saver Showcase for 2005, opened officially on Monday, October 24. A day of celebratory public activities will be held Saturday, October 29.

The U.S. Department of Energy's Federal Energy Management Program has recognized the building in Charlestown as part of its You Have the Power program, whose goal is to spread the word about saving energy costs and resources among federal workers.

The building's sustainable design involved careful site planning, recycling, and energy and water conservation. Building materials used for the project included durable and long-lived recycled materials with no or low-emissions, such as engineered wood, plastic lumber, linoleum flooring, fiberboard, sheetrock, tile, bamboo flooring, and carpet with high recycled content.

Super insulation, energy-efficient lighting and windows, passive solar architecture, and a 40-ton renewable geothermal heat exchange system will help to save as much as 40 percent of traditional building energy costs. Low-flush toilets and flow restrictors minimize water use.

More than 100,000 people a year are expected to visit the center and learn about New England's wildlife and coastal environments.

For more information, contact Janis Nepshinsky, Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex, (401) 364-9124 ext. 28.



USFWS photo

## Volunteers Plant Thousands of Trees on South Texas Refuge

Hundreds of volunteers joined to plant 20,000 seedlings on 42 acres of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge on October 15, the 16th annual Rio Reforestation Day. All of the seedlings are native plants that will provide food, habitat, and cover for birds, butterflies, and other wildlife.

The refuge is continually purchasing land, much of which is former cropland that needs to be reforested. Of the 1,100 plant species native to the refuge, 40 will be planted during reforestation efforts. Refuge staff members collect seeds and grow native plants for reforestation, supplemented by seedlings grown specifically for the refuge by professional nurseries.

Scheduled in the fall because of the need for soil moisture, the annual event now generates impressive community interest, with "people waiting for the event's announcement" each year, according to Patty Alexander, Public Outreach Specialist for the South Texas Refuge Complex. The reforestation project has also spawned local interest in landscaping with native plants.

Since 1994, reforestation day volunteers have planted 131,942 native seedlings on 552 acres, making the activity one of the largest annual volunteer work events held by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

For more information, contact Patty Alexander, South Texas Refuge Complex, (956) 784-7632.

## Avian Bird Flu

Most of us have read or heard media and other accounts regarding the spread of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, referred to as H5N1. To date, this virulent form of avian influenza has not been detected in either wild or domestic birds or in humans, in North America. In fact, between 1998 and 2004 more than 12,000 wild bird samples from Alaska have been analyzed, and no evidence of this virus has been discovered. We know that birds migrating from Asia to Alaska could potentially carry the H5N1 virus. However, based upon recent and ongoing surveillance, knowledge of the scope of the disease in Asia, and the projected movement of birds from affected areas, it is unlikely that H5N1 will be carried by birds migrating from Asia to North America this fall or winter.

The Service, along with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), State and university partners, is continuing surveillance of wild birds in Alaska for the H5N1 virus, and we are working with an interagency group of scientists, public health and policy officials to design an intensified effort for surveillance and early detection of this virus in wild birds.

This effort will help ensure that we are in position to support prompt detection and response activities, and take appropriate measures to conserve bird populations and protect the safety of our employees, partners and the public.

The USGS National Wildlife Health Center, in consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has produced Wildlife Health Bulletin 05-03, entitled Interim Guidelines for the Protection of Persons Handling Wild Birds With Reference to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1. While reiterating that the H5N1 virus has not been detected in North America, this occasion reminds us of the importance of sensible safety practices. Therefore, all Fish and Wildlife Service employees and agents (including contractors and volunteers) are expected to adhere to this guidance in the handling of wild birds. As the situation and information with regard to the H5N1 virus changes, these guidelines may be updated.

For additional information and references on avian influenza and H5N1, visit the National Wildlife Health Center Avian Influenza web page.

Contact: Nicholas Throckmorton, (202) 208-5636.

# Historic Cabin of Nevada Gunslinger Opens



*Longstreet cabin. USFWS photo*

After suffering decades of neglect, the restored Nevada pioneer cabin of Andrew Jackson "Jack" Longstreet, a western folk legend, opened to the public on October 22.

The stone cabin, which had deteriorated and almost collapsed, was revealed in its original state at an open house on the Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. It will be used as an interpretive site, bringing to life the cultural and natural history of the refuge.

Longstreet tried to avoid the law by living in remote places like Ash Meadows, and was reputed to "settle arguments with a gun, and champion those who could not protect themselves,"

according to the Death Valley Forum. His cabin, located beside one of the refuge's warm water springs, was built in 1896.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received a Nevada Historic Preservation Award this spring for the cabin restoration because "it will enhance the experience of visitors to the refuge and illustrate Nevada's historic past." The project, which has taken several years, has been funded by a grant from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act.

For more information, contact Lou Ann Speulda, Historian, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (775) 861-6335.

# Endangered Salamanders in Texas

A pipe replacement in San Marcos Springs (formerly Aquarena Springs) in the San Marcos River in Texas provides an opportunity to collect highly endangered Texas blind salamanders. The salamander spends its life in complete darkness underground in the water-filled limestone caves of the Edwards Aquifer near San Marcos—unless it gets too close to a natural spring. Then the force of the spring shoots the salamander out of the groundwater and into the river where it often becomes catfish food. The pipe provides a way to catch salamanders in a net at the end of the pipe, instead of losing these rare salamanders to hungry fish.

The aquifer under Diversion Springs holds the only known natural population of the Texas blind salamander. Since the salamander spends its life in complete darkness, nature has decided it does not need any eyes. Instead this subterranean salamander has two black dots where others would have eyes. Its skin is white and translucent. The captured salamanders will begin a new life as part of a breeding population at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's San Marcos National Fish Hatchery and Technological Center. The Center is the only facility that rears Texas blind salamanders to augment the natural, but very limited, population.

Contact: Elizabeth Slown, 505-248-6909.



*Texas blind salamander. Photo by Glenn Longly/USFWS*

For all the latest news releases from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, visit our Virtual Newsroom at  
<http://news.fws.gov/newsreleases>