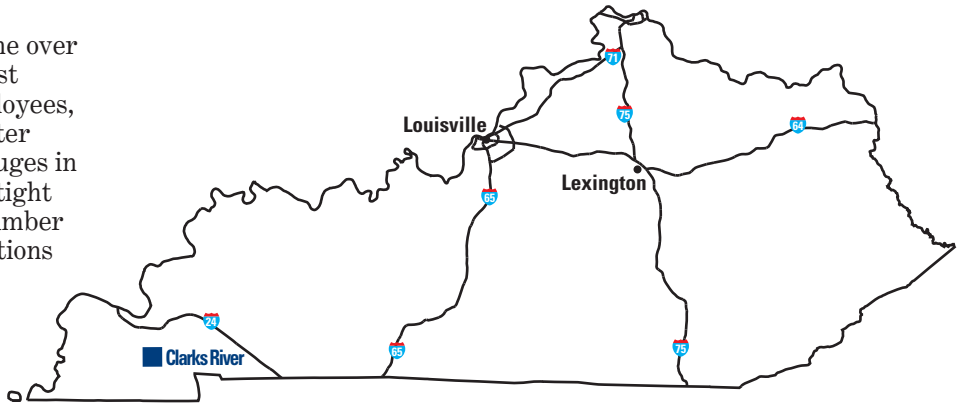
Managing National Wildlife Refuges with Declining Federal Budgets

Kentucky – October 2006

State of Southeast Refuges

Refuge budgets are predicted to decline over the next several years. In the Southeast Region, with 128 refuges and 748 employees, the tighter budgets present even greater challenges than for other regions. Refuges in the Southeast have managed through tight budgets in the past by reducing the number of full-time employees (FTE's) as positions have become vacant. This has been accomplished through retirements, transfers and promotions and has resulted in the abolishment of 68 permanent positions in FY05-FY06. Refuge operating dollars have rebounded from around 5% in 2003 to about 14% in 2006. However, each year with the annual cost of living increases, we need an extra $2 million dollars in the Southeast just to stay even.



The reductions of our refuge workforce in the past have been randomly scattered throughout the Region leaving some refuges fully staffed while others are functioning with a depleted workforce. This workforce reduction has helped refuges achieve operational margins, but has resulted in a fragmented workforce. "Chance" is not a reasonable or intelligent way to distribute people or achieve our critical missions.

The forecast for budgets through 2011 is to remain flat or even decline slightly. Annual cost of living increases, inflation, and higher energy costs will continue to take funds away from our core refuge mission. If this trend holds, our budget and operational costs (salaries, operations and maintenance costs) will intersect by 2011, and we will be operating "in the red." Continuing down this road without a plan is a formula for disaster.

To better prepare for the projected budget shortfalls and better balance our workforce across the region's refuges, this Workforce Management Plan has been developed to direct budgets toward our highest priority refuges and/or to achieve mission critical objectives.

What's in the plan?

The plan carefully reviewed the trust resources, management activities, size, complexity, and public use at each refuge in the region. Each refuge was then placed in one of three categories (Focus, Targeted Reduction, Unstaffed Satellite) to better allocate funding resources more strategically.

How the Plan Affects Kentucky National Wildlife Refuges

Refuge	*Functionality***	*FTE-06*	*- FTE Positions*
Clarks River	2	4	
Kentucky Total		**4**	**0**

****Functionality of Refuges**

1 - Focus includes 24 refuges that will strive to maintain or enhance existing field operations. These refuges are identified because of the significance of the natural resources, important opportunities for priority wildlife-dependent recreation, or other highly significant values that make their operations top priorities. Positions at some of these refuges will still be eliminated.

2 - Targeted Reduction includes 61 refuges identified as places where reduction in operations will occur. They may have significant natural resources, opportunities for priority wildlife-dependent recreation, or other significant values, but their priority is less than focus refuges.

3 - Unstaffed Satellite includes 43 refuges that have never been staffed or will be destaffed because of budget shortfalls.