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News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
7258 x 235
January 16, 2004

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Increasing waterfowl and shorebirds numbers at Laguna Cartagena National Wildlife Refuge

The largest number of waterfowl and shorebirds seen at Laguna Cartagena in at least two decades!

During a site visit last week to Laguna Cartagena NWR by our staff, over 1,000 waterfowl and shorebirds were observed. Roughly 95% were blue-winged teal, along with ruddy ducks, northern shovelers, Caribbean coots, common moorhens, American wigeons and lesser scaups. This likely constitutes the largest single count since the late 60s. Prior to the construction of Lajas Valley irrigation canal system in the 50s, high counts were 17,000 waterfowl and 100,000 shorebirds. The present lagoon is a remnant of what was once a large open expanse of water and one of the most important freshwater habitats for migrating waterfowl and aquatic birds in Puerto Rico. Due to agriculture practices (irrigation drainage canal and fertilizer runoff) and sugar cane production over the years about 90% percent of the lagoon became covered with cattail, which precluded use by almost all other species, animal or plant.

Since it became a National Wildlife Refuge in 1989, the Service has been working together with other agencies and partners to restore and maintain this locally important wetland ecosystem for the benefit of the endangered species and migratory and aquatic birds and to develop a restoration plan which has been implemented as funding becomes available. Recent management actions have included extending the drainage canal, helping to dry out the lagoon, necessary in the short term to help remove the cattail. This in combination with a recent drought and fire has assisted in reducing cattail cover to roughly 65% of the lagoon creating approximately 100 acres of open water habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 94-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64

fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

