

Maintenance and Resource Management, Inextricable

By Geoffrey L. Haskett

Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

I've visited hundreds of national wildlife refuges over my career with the Fish and Wildlife Service. While each refuge is different, every one is the same in at least one respect: Maintenance and natural resource management go hand-in-hand.

When we talk about building impoundments for waterfowl or using prescribed fire as a management tool, we might think about refuge managers, wildlife biologists or fire professionals making the decisions that make a national wildlife refuge run. We sometimes forget to credit as well the people who run the swamp buggies and tractors to get the job done.

Today, the Refuge System maintains more than \$20 billion in facilities and a fleet of about 13,800 vehicles and other heavy equipment that need to be in top running condition. For that, too, we depend on our maintenance crews.

In 1988, the Refuge System became the first agency within the Department of the Interior to institute a heavy equipment safety training program. We are proud of our remarkable safety record.

Equally important, our maintenance crews have a great record of achievement. They build levees, install water control structures and construct everything from boardwalks to barns. For one example, turn to page XX in this issue and read how a Maintenance Action Team renovated and expanded a 35-year-old headquarters building at a fraction of what a private contractor planned to charge.

Maintenance work is inherently dangerous, no less so on national wildlife refuges, where habitat has to be protected and every piece of land has its own unique hazards. We want our maintenance folks to go home safely to their families each night. We want national wildlife refuges to be places that wildlife call home and where visitors experience quality wildlife-dependent recreation. The people on our maintenance crews work with diligence and intelligence so both goals are met. So here's to the accomplishments of scores of maintenance crews who physically make our national wildlife refuges such natural treasures.