

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES ISSUED

Copies of the final environmental impact statement on the operation of the National Wildlife Refuge System may be obtained by writing to: Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Refuges, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

The statement, issued November 12, was prepared as a result of a lawsuit brought in 1974 by private conservation groups concerned with how the 367 individual refuges were being funded and managed. A draft statement was issued in November 1975. Following that, eight public hearings and over 200 written comments from Federal, State, and local agencies, plus 59 conservation groups, five universities, and numerous private citizens prompted changes in the final version.

The changes reflect concerns expressed over major issues such as haying and grazing, refuge hunting and trapping, use of chemicals, changes in traditional waterfowl distribution patterns, and waterfowl depredation upon agricultural crops.

This EIS is a "programmatic" statement as opposed to a "site-specific" statement. It is an environmental document which recognizes the major components of refuge operation, identifies the principal biological, physical and social impacts associated with routine activities on refuges, such

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as farming, waterfowl population control, and water management, and provides sufficiently broad impact analysis to allow the decisionmaker to choose the least environmentally damaging course of action.

Normally, environmental statements such as this describe a proposal. Since this statement involves budget, and since future changes in budget and program emphasis as directed by the Secretary cannot be anticipated, the only course of action was to analyze the impact of present funding levels for the next 10 years. It is obvious that a decline in refuge outputs would occur under a static budget situation because of normal inflation. Therefore, the only operating procedure remaining for this EIS was to adjust programs downward. To quote the EIS, "Wildlife is the principal commodity and fulfilling their needs is the primary responsibility of the NWRS. All other assignments are subordinate to that obligation." The basic elements of wildlife habitat conservation would take priority over public use programs in competition for a limited number of dollars.

The EIS is a virtual encyclopedia of basic ecological information on land areas as different as the tundra of Alaska, islands of Hawaii, the dry desert country of the southwest, and the tropical regions of Florida. The scientific data assembled will serve as a valuable research tool for scientists and laymen alike.

The EIS is designed to cover a 10-year span of normal operations. It will be updated regularly throughout that period as additional scientific data are collected. It should facilitate the preparation of more site-specific assessments that future proposed actions might require under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.