



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

For Release: December 16, 1993

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SERVICE ASSESSES OPTIONS FOR MANAGING KEY FEDERAL-STATE CONSERVATION PROGRAM

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering possible changes in the way it manages the cornerstone fish and wildlife conservation program that funnels hundreds of millions of dollars each year to state wildlife agencies.

The Service outlined five alternatives for future administration of the Federal Aid in Fish and Wildlife Restoration Program as part of a draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

These alternatives range from decreasing the Service's role in approving and monitoring specific state projects funded by Federal Aid to increasing federal-state cooperation in planning and setting regional and national priorities for projects.

The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson Act), signed in 1937, and the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson Act), signed in 1950, collectively have raised more than \$4 billion from excise taxes paid on hunting and fishing equipment.

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The money is distributed to the states for projects proposed by the states and approved by the Service. These projects range from restoring wetlands and other fish and wildlife habitat to establishing hunter education programs to constructing shooting ranges and boat ramps. Federal Aid funds pay for up to 75 percent of the cost of each project while the states contribute at least 25 percent of the cost. Many states rely on the Federal Aid program for a significant portion of their conservation funding.

The five alternatives examined in the draft EIS are:

Alternative 1 -- No change to existing program direction.

Alternative 2 -- Emphasis on establishing national and regional priorities and encouraging states to consider funding projects that contribute to regional or national priorities. Priorities would be cooperatively identified by the Service and the states in consultation with the public.

Alternative 3 -- Emphasis on additional funding for biodiversity and watchable wildlife programs and projects.

Alternative 4 -- Emphasis on providing more flexibility to allow states to meet their needs, such as aquatic education expansion and adult education in wildlife programs.

Alternative 5 -- Emphasis on eliminating most Service overview of state projects, including project approval. States would be provided program rules, general guidance, and apportionment of funds. States would provide reports of accomplishments and would be periodically monitored by the Service.

Copies of the draft statement are available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Federal Aid, Room 140, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Arlington, Virginia. Completion of this supplemental EIS will update an EIS on the Federal Aid program issued by the Service in 1978.

The Service is seeking public comment on the draft through January 17, 1994. Written comments should be sent to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Federal Aid, 1849 C Street, NW, (ARL SQ 140) Washington, DC 20240.

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