



605 FW 7

Interpretation

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7.1 What is the purpose of this chapter? This chapter provides the Service's policy governing the management of interpretive programs on units of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System). In an effort to avoid redundancy, we have placed critical information and guidance for all wildlife-dependent recreation (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation) in [605 FW 1](#). Read 605 FW 1 with this chapter for complete information for planning and implementation purposes.

7.2 What is the scope of this chapter? The policies contained in this chapter apply to interpretive programs within the Refuge System. See [605 FW 1](#) and other chapters and regulations governing policies, guidelines, and procedures for additional information.

7.3 What is our policy regarding interpretation in the Refuge System?

A. The overarching goal of our wildlife-dependent recreation policy is to enhance opportunities and access to quality visitor experiences on refuges and to manage the refuge to conserve fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats (see [605 FW 1.6](#)).

B. Interpretation is an appropriate use of the Refuge System when compatible. It is also a priority general public use of the Refuge System and should receive enhanced consideration over nonpriority uses. We strongly encourage refuge managers to provide quality interpretive opportunities and programs when compatible. Interpretive programs will promote understanding and appreciation of natural and cultural resources and their management on all lands and waters in the Refuge System. We encourage refuge staff to develop and take full advantage of opportunities to work with partners who have an interest in helping us promote quality interpretive programs on refuges.

7.4 What are the guiding principles of the Refuge System's interpretive programs? The guiding principles of the Refuge System's interpretive programs are to:

A. Promote visitor understanding of, and increase appreciation for, America's natural and cultural resources and conservation history by providing safe, informative, enjoyable, and accessible interpretive opportunities, products, and facilities;

B. Develop a sense of stewardship leading to actions and attitudes that reflect interest and respect for wildlife resources, cultural resources, and the environment;

C. Provide quality interpretive experiences that help people understand and

appreciate the individual refuge and its role in the Refuge System;

D. Provide opportunities for quality recreational and interpretive experiences consistent with criteria describing quality found in [605 FW 1.6](#);

E. Assist refuge staff, volunteers, and community support groups in attaining knowledge, skills, and abilities in support of interpretation; and

F. Minimize conflicts with visitors participating in other compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities.

7.5 What authorities allow us to support interpretation in the Refuge System?

See [605 FW 1.3](#) for laws and Executive orders that govern interpretation in the Refuge System.

7.6 What do these terms mean?

A. Interpretation. A communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the audience and the resource.

B. Interpretive Objectives. Desired, measurable outcomes of an interpretive program.

C. Interpretive Programs. Activities, talks, publications, audio-visual media, signs, and exhibits that convey key natural and cultural resource messages to visitors.

D. Interpretive Theme Statements. Tools that cohesively develop an idea or ideas. Interpretive theme statements express meaning, link a tangible resource to its intangible meanings, and organize interpretive programs. An example of an interpretive theme statement is: "Human interaction with wildlife not only affords opportunities for personal exploration and understanding, but also fundamental research that improves the management of wildlife and their habitat."

7.7 What is the role of interpretation? As one of the six wildlife-dependent recreational uses of the Refuge System, interpretation provides opportunities for visitors to make their own connections to the resource. By providing opportunities to connect to the resource, interpretation provokes participation in resource stewardship. It helps refuge visitors understand their relationships to, and impacts on, those resources.

7.8 Why should we include interpretive planning in a visitor services plan (VSP)? We are involved in interpretive planning for the following reasons:

A. Interpretive planning helps focus staff time, funding, and other resources on primary interpretive theme statements and provides focus and direction to interpretive programs. Planning can also help set field station and funding priorities and help identify partnership opportunities.

B. When we develop VSPs, they become the basis for the development of future programs and services. New activities should always relate to and support the interpretive theme statements developed in the refuge VSP.

7.9 What are the standards and requirements for interpretive programs? When we develop interpretive programs, we use the following:

A. Principles of Interpretation. We develop interpretive programs and products that reflect principles of interpretation in the [Service's Interpretative Development Model](#). Our interpretive programs link the resources of the Refuge System and the specific refuge with the concepts and values visitors bring to our sites. Through interpretation, we strive to:

- (1) Relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor. Interpretation helps provide meaningful context.
- (2) Reveal key themes and concepts to visitors based on information. Information, as such, is not interpretation. However, all interpretation includes information.
- (3) Inspire and develop curiosity, not just instruct.
- (4) Relate enough of the story to introduce concepts and ideas and pique visitor interest, discussion, and investigation so that visitors will develop their own conclusions.
- (5) Organize activities around theme statements.

B. Interpretation as a Management Tool. Well-designed interpretive programs can be effective resource management tools. For many visitors, taking part in an interpretive program may be their primary contact with a refuge, the Refuge System, and the Service. It is their chance to find out about refuge resource management objectives and could be their first contact with conservation and wildlife. Through these contacts, we have the opportunity to influence visitor attitudes about natural resources, refuges, the Refuge System, and the Service and to influence visitor behavior when visiting units of the Refuge System. Interpretive planning and subsequent activities and products can:

- (1) Provide opportunities for visitors to become interested in, learn about, and understand natural and cultural resource management and our fish and wildlife conservation history;
- (2) Help visitors understand their role within the natural world;
- (3) Communicate rules and regulations to visitors, thereby promoting understanding and compliance to solve or prevent potential management problems;
- (4) Help us make management decisions and build visitor support by providing insight into management practices; and
- (5) Help visitors enjoy quality wildlife experiences on the refuge.

C. Why We Should Make Interpretation Accessible. Meeting accessibility requirements gives us the opportunity to provide better interpretive programs for everyone. Creating programs that are easily read and understood, developing

facilities that are accessible to all people, and providing exhibits that contain audio or tactile elements can benefit everyone through multiple paths to learning.

7.10 What delivery methods do we use for interpretive activities? We provide a variety of interpretive programs and opportunities that appeal to a broad spectrum of interests and learning styles. There are two broad categories of interpretive activities: self-guided and personal services. Self-guided interpretation includes publications, signs, exhibits, and audio-visual media. Personal service includes activities such as guided talks and tours, group presentations, and special events. We strive for:

- A.** Quality, self-guided services, because they reach a larger audience, are more readily available, and visitors can use them at their own pace;
- B.** Quality personal contact to initiate discussion and answer questions; and
- C.** A variety of interpretive experiences that appeal to varying audiences, visitor interests, and learning styles.

7.11 What guidelines do we use for effective interpretation? We will develop interpretive programs and products that reflect the principles of interpretation set forth in the Service's Interpretive Development Model. Following are interpretive media available to us:

- A.** Self-guided products designed for the site and audience. The Regional visitor services chief and program coordinators can assist with planning, design, and contracting for production of self-guided products.
- B.** Brochures and publications that we design following the Service Graphic Standards for Publications. The Government Printing Office (GPO) does our printing and duplication. Regional printing coordinators must approve requests to use a commercial source instead of GPO.

7.12 How do we evaluate our interpretive programs?

A. We evaluate interpretive programs to measure their effectiveness. Evaluations should be performed regularly and should measure both the quality of the resource experience and the effects of the activity on refuge resources. This will help us determine if we use program resources (including funding and staffing) effectively. When we are developing a program, we use evaluation measures that focus on desired results and involve techniques that improve outcomes. At the end of an interpretive project or program, we evaluate final outcomes and determine if we met program and participant objectives. We must tie our evaluations to Service priorities, objectives, funding, and staffing.

B. Evaluations should be a part of visitor use field station reviews, and they should measure our effectiveness in interpreting the refuge's resources. A wide variety of evaluation tools exist, from asking visitors how they rate their interpretive experience to distributing an approved customer satisfaction survey. If more detailed information is needed, a refuge may contract with a university or private company to conduct a formal survey. If a refuge manager decides to create a new visitor-oriented survey to evaluate the visitor's experience, he or she must follow

approved information collection procedures and work with the Division of Policy and Directives Management in Headquarters to submit the required information to the Office of Management and Budget for approval.

For information on the specific content of this chapter, contact the Division of Conservation, Planning and Policy. For information about this website, contact Krista Holloway in the Division of Policy and Directives Management, at Krista.Holloway@fws.gov.

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