

*Chief's corner*

### **What We Do Now**

Accelerating climate change is a most compelling conservation challenge. While it might actually benefit some fish and wildlife species, it will certainly devastate others. In short, it will have more far-reaching impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat than anything we've seen so far.

With 177 national wildlife refuges along maritime coasts, the National Wildlife Refuge System, in concert with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is taking a strategic approach because we know the challenges can't be ignored. That is one reason we have focused on climate change in this issue of *Refuge Update*.

As we work to devise conservation strategies that will help fish and wildlife adapt, the key word is "strategic". We know some of the issues we will confront, including the quantity and quality of available water and the probability that we see more wild fires, with greater intensity and rates of spread. Other issues will be clarified as we fill in our knowledge gaps.

The Refuge System's scientists, wildlife managers and policy professionals have built a legacy of leadership over the past 100-plus years. With our partners and a strong science foundation, the Service and the Refuge System have shown innovation, creativity and imagination in conserving the wildlife legacy we enjoy today. We will bring all of that -- and more -- to bear on the climate change challenge we face.

We have started the process. We are undertaking sea-level rise analyses to assess what will happen to our coastal refuges. Using leading-edge science and technology, we are, for example, analyzing the impacts of changing precipitation patterns on waterfowl production habitat and prioritizing land protection actions to maintain sustainable waterfowl populations.

Among the scores of steps we will take in the year ahead, the Service will move quickly to expand our understanding of climate change's impacts on wildlife. We will work closely with partners to identify the habitats most critical across landscapes. We will look for opportunities to create redundancy and resiliency in the refuge system just as we have in the past when confronted with conservation challenges. We will move our own agency toward carbon neutrality, and we will educate and engage our citizens about what they can do in their own homes and businesses.

We have to make wise decisions now to ensure that our nation's fish and wildlife resources will thrive in the future. That won't be easy. But we are determined that historians will be able to herald our dedicated professionals and leaders as visionaries who worked to promote wildlife and wildland conservation practices across the landscape. What we do now matters for all time.