

Refuge System Chief Jim Kurth Named Service Deputy Director

Jim Kurth, a major presence in National Wildlife Refuge System leadership for the past decade and a half, has been promoted to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service deputy director for operations.

Kurth was chief of the Refuge System from October 2011 until January 2015, when he was named to the deputy director position vacated by Rowan Gould. Gould retired in December 2014 after a distinguished 38-year career with the Service.

Before becoming chief, Kurth was deputy chief for 12 years. His 15-year tenure in refuge leadership marked unprecedented growth in which the Refuge System added more than 60 new units encompassing more than 50 million acres. Beginning in 2011, Kurth led development and implementation of *Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation* – a blueprint for the future growth and management of the Refuge System.

“Jim Kurth is a natural leader with proven ability to effectively manage far-flung operations and meet complex conservation challenges. He understands how to multiply resources, and inspire and engage people. Most importantly, Jim loves the Service, its employees and its partners,” Service Director Dan Ashe said in announcing Kurth’s promotion. “I’m excited to work with Jim to continue improving the agency and strengthening our landscape-level collaborations with state wildlife agencies and other key partners.”

As deputy director for operations, Kurth will promote and implement the Service’s mission and priorities throughout the United States and abroad by developing and strengthening partnerships with other federal agencies and foreign governments, states, tribes, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. He will also assist Director Ashe in ensuring agency performance and accountability, customer service and consistent application of all Service resource management policies.

Kurth will be responsible for managing the day-to-day implementation of the Service’s field-based mission. This includes overseeing an appropriated budget of \$2.5 billion, and nearly 9,000 employees working across the nation and in many foreign countries. These employees spearhead efforts to conserve the nation’s native fish, wildlife and plants on 562 national wildlife refuges and 38 wetland management districts encompassing more than 560 million acres in all 50 states and U.S. territories; operate 69 national fish hatcheries; and administer fish and wildlife programs, including endangered species recovery, from 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field offices nationwide.

Kurth is a 35-year Service veteran and a career federal employee. He began his Refuge System career in 1979 at Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge. He then moved on to a series of positions with progressively greater responsibilities at Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee Refuge in Florida, Bogue Chitto Refuge in Louisiana, Seney Refuge in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and Ninigret Refuge in Rhode Island.

Beginning in 1994 until he became deputy chief, Kurth managed the 20-million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northern Alaska – the largest wildlife refuge in the United States. Arctic Refuge also contains the 8-million-acre Mollie Beattie Wilderness Area, the largest

wilderness within the Refuge System. During his time there, Kurth proved adept at bringing competing interests together and navigating complex environmental challenges affecting one of the nation's most prominent refuges.

Cynthia Martinez, who has been deputy chief of the Refuge System, will serve as acting chief until Kurth's replacement is selected.