DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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NEW WILDLIFE LABORATORY ESTABLISHED

A unique wildlife health laboratory is being opened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Wisconsin to prevent and reduce disease losses among the Nation's wildlife.

"The lab will be set up by the first of the year at the University of Wisconsin. The university's tight isolation facilities which consist of a series of air locks, showers, and clothing change rooms will allow Fish and Wildlife Service scientists to work safely with highly communicable wildlife diseases," Director Lynn A. Greenwalt said.

In addition Fish and Wildlife scientists will have access to a unique BIOTRON which is a National Science Foundation funded facility that contains a number of rooms in which environmental factors such as temperature, humidity, pressure, and light can be controlled by computer programming.

Top on the list of priorities for applied research is Duck Virus Enteritis, known as DVE or duck plague, a major threat to ducks and geese about which little is known. In 1973 this disease wiped out 40,000 ducks at one location. Scientists hope to learn what this disease looks like in different species, discover which species are more susceptible to it and under what conditions, and refine techniques for managing outbreaks. This will involve studies of how the disease is transmitted in the wild and whether a vaccine can be developed. Moreover, basic research will explore the entire natural history of the disease in the environment in the hope of identifying weak links that can be attacked.

Staffed by Fish and Wildlife Service scientists, the lab will also be able to draw on the talents of leading scientific authorities on wildlife diseases from the staff of the University of Wisconsin. Graduate student research talent will be available too.

In addition to DVE, other diseases such as avian cholera and botulism will be studied. The center will conduct research on diseases affecting other species of wildlife, provide diagnostic service for the more than 350 National Wildlife Refuges across the country, and give the Fish and Wildlife Service a forensic medicine capability to assist in law enforcement efforts nationwide. It will also perform field and lab postmortems on wildlife that die to assist states and other Federal agencies in their field work. Diagnostic efforts at the new facility will be conducted in cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture.

In the future, scientists envision the center becoming a major repository for data on waterfowl and wildlife diseases and a unique training facility for state and Federal wildlife biologists.

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