DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release May 26, 1975 McGarvey 202/343-5634

SCIENTIFIC TEAMS FIELDED BY U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Four national scientific teams scheduled to be established this summer will assist the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in getting abreast of and outpacing fast-moving development decisions in four vital areas of national concern--stream alteration, powerplant siting, western energy and land use, and coastal development projects.

These teams of experts will provide guidance and direction for a program of research projects, dissemination of environmental information, and technical support to Fish and Wildlife Service field personnel.

Stream alteration--long a destroyer of vital wildlife habitat and fish life cycles--will be studied in locations as varied as Louisiana, Minnesota, Alaska, and Hawaii. Gravel mining of certain streambeds in Alaska for pipeline construction, for example, could pose a threat to salmon spawning and base-line study data must be gathered before such activities begin. The effects of dredging the Upper Mississippi River to keep it open to commerce will be explored to better understand the fundamental ecological disruptions. Efforts will be made to identify the alternatives which will result in less environmental damage.

The Stream Alteration National Team will be located at Columbia, Missouri, where a team of six experts in aquatic biology, hydrology, botany, wildlife biology, and biometrics will design and manage contract studies across the Nation, assess and collate the findings, and transmit

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the results to Federal personnel responsible for making decisions on stream projects. They further plan to publish complete and practical guidelines in handbooks on all environmental aspects of stream alteration. As the goal is to get ahead of the game, existing scientific expertise will be tapped rapidly by contracting for much of the field research. A total of 15 projects involving 19 States are already underway or are slated to start this summer.

Scores of new powerplants in many States are a virtual certainty for the years ahead. Their location, design, and operating characteristics are of major concern to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service because of their potential for damaging aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. The Powerplant Siting National Team will be located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and its seven members will include skills in oceanography, economics, and engineering, as well as fishery and wildlife biology. The range of their work will include the Great Lakes shores, all major rivers, and all marine coastal areas. The long-term effect of high-voltage transmission lines on wildlife will also be investigated. The national team will direct a number of study projects and will funnel the results into the Federal decisionmaking process as described above.

Environmentalists of all persuasions and individual citizens nationwide express concern daily about the rapidity of water, oil, gas, geothermal, and coal decisions in the Western States. This crucial area will be studied by a team of 16 experts operating as the Western Energy and Land Use National Team out of Fort Collins, Colorado. Among their projects will be surveys from earth-orbiting satellites, using color infrared photographs of western coal-bearing areas to better understand plant and animal relationships. They will also develop plans to reclaim "orphaned" mining land with vegetation suitable for wildlife habitat. A total of 32 projects in 14 States are being started.

Coastal development continues apace in this country and now includes plans for significant oil drilling enterprises off all coasts plus deep water port construction, bulkhead construction, dredging and filling operations, logging, mining, and numerous other construction projects. A team of nine scientists will make up the Coastal Ecosystems National Team. They will be located at Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, and plan major studies of sea and wading bird colonies to see what effects offshore oil development has on nesting and other requirements. An ecological assessment of estuaries and near-shore marine environments will also be undertaken. A total of 6 projects in 12 States have been initiated or soon will start under the direction of this team.

The four national teams will work closely with counterpart experts located in the various Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Offices. Staff have been selected, following a widescale recruitment effort in which the scientific and academic world was alerted to the personnel needs of the Fish and Wildlife Service. This program, known as Biological Services, was funded by Congress to begin in fiscal year 1975. Fiscal year 1976 will see the concept move into full scale operation. When fully staffed, over 170 scientists will be working on this vital effort.

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