



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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WATT ANNOUNCES NEW DEPARTMENTAL POLICY ON FISH AND WILDLIFE

Secretary of the Interior James Watt announced today the adoption of a new policy addressing State and Federal relationships in managing fish and wildlife resources. "This policy will clarify authorities and responsibilities of the States and the Federal Government in the stewardship of our nation's fish and wildlife resources," Watt said. "And it reaffirms the basic role of States in managing fish and resident wildlife, especially where States have primary authority and responsibility."

The policy is designed to update the 1971 policy initiated by then Secretary Walter Hickel that has until now governed roles and responsibilities of four Interior agencies: Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation. A draft of the policy made available for public comment last fall received widespread support among conservationists and natural resource agencies.

"The purpose of the policy is to improve fish and wildlife conservation by eliminating confusion that had arisen in the past decade over fish and wildlife authorities," Secretary Watt said. "Moreover, it promotes new opportunities for cooperation between State and Federal wildlife management agencies."

Under the policy, Interior agencies will prepare fish and wildlife management plans in cooperation with State fish and wildlife agencies and other Federal agencies where appropriate. When such plans are prepared for Federal lands adjoining State or private lands, the agencies will consult with the State and private landowners to coordinate management objectives. The Interior bureaus will also institute fish and wildlife habitat management practices in cooperation with the States to assist them in accomplishing their fish and wildlife resource plans.

The new policy also calls for Interior agencies to provide for public use of Federal lands in accordance with State and Federal laws and to permit hunting, fishing and trapping within statutory and budgetary limitations, and in a manner compatible with the main land use objectives. On those Federal lands already opened to such harvest activities, Interior will not exercise its closure authority without first consulting with the States affected, except in emergency situations.

Another feature of the new policy concerns the effect of international agreements on State management prerogatives. Henceforth, the Interior Department will recommend that the United States negotiate and accede only to those international agreements that give strong consideration to established State wildlife conservation programs. The Department will also actively solicit the advice of affected State agencies, and recommend to the U.S. Department of State that representatives of these agencies be involved before and during negotiation of any new international convention concerning fish and wildlife.

Additional features of the new policy call for greater use of cooperative agreements between States and the Federal agencies regarding such topics as law enforcement; fish and wildlife propagation and reintroduction; educational programs; habitat preservation; toxicity investigations and monitoring; and other wildlife management topics. The Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Policy is designed to further enhance State-Federal relationships and instill a new spirit of cooperation in the management of this nation's fish and wildlife resources.

Copies of the Fish and Wildlife Policy are available in limited numbers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Public Affairs, Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C. 20240, (202) 343-5634.

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