



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news releases

STATEMENT BY INTERIOR SECRETARY BRUCE BABBITT ON REFUGE LEGISLATION H.R. 1675, National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act

Last December I notified the House Resources Committee that I would recommend a veto of this measure because it would weaken, not strengthen, our national wildlife refuges. The bill now awaits action in the Senate and I remain opposed to it. Instead, I believe the refuge system is well served by the President's Executive Order #12996 and I am committed to its speedy and full implementation. Here are my reasons:

Preserving A Legacy: The National Wildlife Refuge System

There is only one reason to support organic legislation for the National Wildlife Refuge System: if it will strengthen protection and management of the system.

H.R. 1675 fails this simple and essential test.

- * It would convert refuges into playgrounds, making wildlife-dependent recreation a refuge system purpose on a par with wildlife conservation;
- * It would make it much more difficult, more time-consuming, and more expensive to acquire new refuges by requiring a separate Act of Congress for each one larger than 500 acres, even when there's a willing seller of wildlife lands in need of protection. Sixty-eight of the 73 refuges created in the last 10 years with Land and Water Conservation Fund monies would have flunked this arbitrary acreage test and would not be in existence today without separate legislation; and
- * It would create loopholes to remove refuges from Federal protection by allowing transfer of existing and new refuges to the states by simply calling them "coordination areas."

H.R. 1675 is not necessary.

President Clinton's Executive Order 12996 passes that test and is good for the refuge system:

- * It reaffirms a fish and wildlife conservation mission for the refuge system;
- * It defines four guiding principles for management of refuge lands, of which the conservation of habitat is the most fundamental;
- * It recognizes compatible wildlife-dependent recreation as the priority;
- * It defines the Secretary's stewardship responsibility to ensure the biological integrity, environmental health, and continued growth of the refuge system for the benefit of present and future generations; and
- * It calls for expanded partnerships, greater public involvement, and expanded opportunities for people to learn about and enjoy the wildlife experience.

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