

News Release

Midwest Region



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Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge welcomes new leadership

We at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Region are pleased welcome Susan White as the new refuge manager of Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge in Michigan. With a global conservation perspective and a wealth of experience, White's leadership is an asset to the internationally-focused refuge.

"We're excited to have Susan on board at Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Her international perspective and diverse experiences make her a perfect fit for this refuge," said Regional Chief of Refuges Charlie Blair.

White brings more than a decade of experience managing the Marine National Monuments of the Pacific, a collection of four protected areas within the National Wildlife Refuge System that span more than 756 million acres of ocean, islands and atolls across the Pacific Ocean. Since 2007, she managed these marine monuments and refuges with a focus on conserving more than 23 million seabirds, vast coral reefs, 26 threatened or endangered species and their habitats, as well as sacred cultural sites, iconic World War II historic resources and supporting the perpetuation of indigenous cultures and traditions. White was the first U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge superintendent of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and World Heritage Site and also oversaw the Pacific Remote Islands, Rose Atoll and Marianas Trench Marine National Monuments.

Coming back to the Detroit area is a homecoming for White. Growing up in Macomb County, a suburb of Detroit, White still has family nearby and looks forward to settling her home in the Downriver area and reacquainting with sights, smells and sounds of her youth.

"I was one of our (sub)urban youth. Nature to me was the vacant lot down the street or in some far-off land. I wasn't aware of the amazing natural resources we have around us in the Detroit area.

Now, after exploring different places for 30 years, I'm excited to be back and discover the wildlife of my home and share it with everyone," White says.

Prior to her time in Hawai'i, White gathered valuable agency experience serving in the southeast regional office in Atlanta where she supervised refuge leaders across 46 refuges in Florida, Mississippi and southern Alabama. From 2002 through 2005, White helped the refuge team as deputy project leader, welcoming innovative partnerships and nearly a million visitors a year to the iconic J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge in southwest Florida.

"My time at 'Ding' Darling showed me the value of creatively working within communities to connect people to the world around them and to find innovative solutions that get people excited about the natural world," said White.

Earlier in her career, White was part of the engine that drove the Marine Protected Areas and Coral Reef Programs. As the National Coordinator in headquarters, she helped develop marine protected area and coral reef conservation policies on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Interior of the Department.

"I'm looking forward to working with the Detroit River team and applying those lessons, as well as lessons from the innovative partnerships in the Pacific. There are amazing things happening at Detroit River and I'm thrilled to become a part of it," continued White.

White got her start with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1997 at the Florida Keys Refuge Complex. She began her journey in the conservation management of protected areas 29 years ago at the Saba Marine Park in the Dutch Caribbean.

A recipient of the Department of the Interior's Distinguished Service Award, White was recognized for formalizing agency marine protection programs, generating national marine protected area policy, crafting two bilateral, international conservation management agreements and successfully executing on-the-ground marine restoration and resource management. This included leading large restoration projects to eradicate non-native rats, control destructive non-native ants and remove harmful shipwrecks to restore coral reef and island ecosystems. White has been a member of International Union for Conservation of Nature's World Commission on Protected Areas since 1990.

White has one son, now grown and living in New York. Outside of work, you can find her rekindling family connections, practicing yoga or hiking the many Downriver trails with her rescued dog, Savanna.



Susan White in front of shipwreck debris at Debris at Kaleloa Harbor. Photo courtesy of Grady Timmons/The Nature Conservancy.

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