

Losing one of your own

by Robin West



We remember refuge manager Richard Guadagno who was lost on United 43.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a small agency, as Federal agencies go. I've heard this said in a variety of ways, such as "the entire Service budget costs less than one MX missile," and other such comparisons. Well, I don't know about all of that, but I do know that in my 23 years with the Service I have met many of those that I consider to be part of a relatively small family. One of those people was Richard Guadagno. Rich was one of the several thousand innocent people who died during the terrorist attacks on September 11.

All 45 people aboard United Airlines Flight 43 were killed when their plane, after leaving Newark in route to San Francisco, turned around near Cleveland, and then crashed approximately 80 miles southeast of Pittsburgh. Rich was on that flight, returning home to California after a two-week vacation visiting his sister in Vermont and parents in New Jersey where he helped celebrate his grandmother's 100th birthday. We now know that this was the hijacked aircraft that was not allowed to reach its intended target due to valiant efforts by passengers to thwart the terrorists. While we will never know exactly what happened, we recognize that our Nation owes a debt to a handful of pas-

sengers on Flight 43 that prevented what would have almost certainly been a much greater loss of life, property, and social order. Either the White House or Capitol was almost certainly the intended target of the hijacked plane. Those who knew Rich well are confident that he was instrumental in the brief but effective fight that ensued on Flight 43.

Rich Guadagno was the Refuge Manager for Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge in northern California. He had a 17-year career with the Federal Government, serving both as a biologist and as a refuge manager. For much of his career he was also a commissioned law enforcement officer. Because of his training in apprehension, self-defense, and arrest, and Rich's strong sense of right and wrong and non-nonsense attitude, it is believed he likely played a key role in the ultimate events of Flight 43.

Rich had a sense of wonder and appreciation for the outdoors that led him to a career with the National Wildlife Refuge System. He started his career as a temporary biologist at Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey. After graduating from Rutgers University in 1984, and serving a short time as a wildlife inspector, he returned to Great Swamp as a refuge manager trainee. From there he moved to Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge in Delaware, to Supawana National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey, to Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge, to Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, and finally to Humboldt Bay.

Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge consists of 2,600 acres of California coastal dunes, wetlands, and bay habitats. It is a major staging area for black brant—a small dark goose—during its migrations between nesting areas in Alaska and wintering areas in Mexico. The Refuge also provides important habitat for over 100,000 other waterfowl and shorebirds each year. Rich was excited about his job at Humboldt Bay. He served the Refuge, the Refuge System, and our shared wildlife resource well. Rich also served his Country well. His name has been added to the Fallen Comrades Memorial Wall at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. His is the 61st name of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

employee that lost their lives in the line of duty. Two other such names include James Petersen and Gerald Watson who died on Skilak Lake in 1955. All of these 61 people are unsung heroes who gave their lives while conducting public service. Rich's contribution to the conservation of the Nation's fish and wildlife was worthy; and his sacrifice on September 11, at only 38 years of age, enormous. We within the Fish and Wildlife Ser-

vice say good-bye to one of our own, with a great sense of gratitude.

Robin West is the Refuge Manager of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, one of over 500 refuges found within the National Wildlife Refuge System. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna, call 262-7021 or see the website at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.