

Sally Jewell, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, visits Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge

By: Mia Infante



Kevin Sloan, Secretary Jewell and her husband, Warren enjoy observing American oystercatchers on one of Virginia's many protected barrier islands.

Exploring Metompkin Island

On Saturday August 8, Sally Jewel, Secretary of the Department of Interior, visited Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. She came with her husband, Warren Jewell, on their days off with plans to see all of Assateague Island. The secretary and her husband first hiked on the Marsh Trail at the Wildlife Loop. Shortly after, they caught up with refuge manager Kevin Sloan at the refuge boat ramp where Federal Wildlife Officer Darin Dick waited with a boat ready to take them on a tour to Metompkin Island, one of the small islands located south of the refuge, partially owned and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Throughout the boat ride the Secretary asked questions relating to the sights they were passing by, such as the town of Chincoteague and Wallops Island. When wildlife was in sight or birds were flying over, Kevin Sloan would provide identification and a brief natural history of the species. Arriving at Metompkin Island, Sloan continued to explain to Secretary Jewell how the refuge strives to protect shorebirds, wildlife and habitat, while keeping in mind the continuous threat of sea level rise. Because of climate change and natural processes, the shorelines are drastically changing, causing the refuge to be ever mindful of the potential effects of climate change and sea level rise on barrier islands. Sloan further talked about the use of the shorelines, discussing the dual usage of the area by both recreationists and wildlife, emphasizing the need to maintain a balance between the two.



This important chain of barrier islands is more than 80 miles long and owned by public and private agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy and the State of Virginia.

The Secretary was also able to visit with Sloan on the service road back on Assateague Island and get a close up interaction with the famous Chincoteague ponies, witnessing their social interactions and behaviors. The Secretary is familiar with the cultural significance of the ponies, as her daughter has read the popular children's novel *Misty of Chincoteague* by Marguerite Henry. Sloan further explained the Chincoteague ponies' background and how much the Chincoteague town depends on them for economic reasons and tradition. He also mentioned how the ponies also have an impact on the relationship between the town and the refuge.

Later in the evening the secretary and her husband had one final tour of the refuge and attended a cookout at the bunkhouse, where the refuge's summer interns are currently residing. There she was able to meet the other refuge permanent and seasonal employees and speak to the interns. Before everyone sat for the meal, Secretary Sally Jewell talked about how much the Department of Interior depends on young people to continue the mission to conserve lands and protect wildlife. She continued on the importance of using the resources we have – even limited resources – to the best of our abilities to strengthen our connection and conservation efforts with the environment.



Mia Infante is a 2015 Visitor Services Intern at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, working towards completion of a Bachelor of Science degree, with an emphasis in Environmental Sciences. Photo Credits should read: (USFWS, Mia Infante)



Secretary Jewell's Message to the 2015 Interns:

If we don't welcome new generations into the outdoors, we won't have advocates for these places and they won't be here in a generation. That is why your work is so important.

