

# Blue Goose Alliance Bulletin

#5 - August 2, 2000

## **Refuge Association Joins Audubon Society in Requesting Further Reforms in Administration of Refuge System**

The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) has been actively involved for some time in the issue of organizational reform for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). It passed its first resolution on this issue at a June 1999 Board of Directors meeting. That was before the National Audubon Society released its "America's Hidden Lands", separate agency proposal. At that time, the NWRA took the following position:

"The NWRS should have a compact and efficient organizational structure,

The head of the NWRS should be a strong, highly visible full-time manager who reports directly to the Director of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service,

Regional refuge supervisors should be responsible solely for refuge management, support, and individual refuge field stations in order to eliminate confusion resulting from the existing multi-layered line/programmatic organizational structure.

Leadership at all levels should be involved in matters affecting the NWRS and individual refuges.

A clear vision for the direction of the NWRS should be consistently applied at all levels throughout the System and be strongly supported by leadership"

At the fall 1999 meeting, the Board was asked to support a resolution adopted by the Citizens in Support of a National Wildlife Refuge Service which read:

"Resolved, The undersigned support the creation of the National Wildlife Refuge Service, an agency within the Department of the Interior that would have as its sole responsibility the management and administration of the National Wildlife Refuge System."

After some discussion and debate, the Board, on November 7, 1999, passed a resolution to take the initiative in convening stake holders and Service leaders by the end of January 2000, to identify those changes that must be made, and to draft an action plan to implement those changes within the year 2000.

As a follow up to that resolution, the NWRA hosted two facilitated meetings, one in December 1999 and another in March 2000. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) leaders and personnel and representatives of various stakeholder groups discussed the needs of the Refuge System and formulated options for meeting those needs. The focus of these meetings were deficiencies in the organization of the FWS relative to the Refuge System.

The Director listened to recommendations from the meeting participants, and soon thereafter she issued directives for changes in the organization of the FWS intended in part to address Refuge System needs.

The NWRA commended the Director of the FWS for these recent actions that were aimed at streamlining the overly complex organization of the Service in the regional offices. However, the NWRA believed that additional changes and improvements were still needed for the National Wildlife Refuge System. In June 2000, the NWRA Board of Directors unanimously passed a resolution stating that the NWRA believes further administrative improvements are needed. These improvements include a vertical structure for the Refuge System encompassing policy, budget, and programs separate from the other Fish and Wildlife Service Divisions, and a chief who has direct authority over the Refuge System. The Board also agreed that the conservation community should continue to explore, develop, and assess all proposals for organizational reform of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

By so doing, the NWRA Board reaffirmed its commitment to attaining greater stature and visibility for the Refuge System among the conservation community, Congress, and the American public. The following is the text of the June resolution:

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RESOLUTION OF THE  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE ASSOCIATION  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING JUNE 2000

Whereas independent findings over the past 30 years, including the Leopold Report (1968), the Assistant Secretary's Task Force (1978), the Defenders of Wildlife report (1992), and the National Audubon Society's "America's Hidden Lands" proposal (1999), have consistently advocated organizational changes which give the National Wildlife Refuge System greater stature, public recognition, and autonomy for planning, budget, and policy implementation; and

Whereas the National Wildlife Refuge Association, in June 1999, committed itself to such reform and subsequently hosted two meetings where participants from stakeholder groups and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service discussed the needs of the Refuge System and options for meeting those needs; and

Whereas the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has stated that the Refuge System, the only Federal land base specifically dedicated to wildlife conservation, deserves recognition and focus; and is presently reorganizing the Service to help raise the visibility and stature of the system; and

Whereas the National Wildlife Refuge Association is dedicated to protecting and perpetuating the Refuge System with a mission to preserve and enhance the integrity of the nation's largest network of lands and waters set aside for the benefit of wildlife.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the National Wildlife Refuge Association:

- I. Commends the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the decision to abolish the overly complex GARD/PARD matrix organization and for designating a Chief of Refuges at the national and regional levels.
- II. Believes that additional Refuge System administrative improvements are needed, specifically a vertical structure for policy, budget and programs separate from the other Fish and Wildlife Service Divisions and a chief who has direct authority over the Refuge System.

III. Reaffirms our commitment to attaining greater stature and visibility for the Refuge System among the conservation community, Congress, and the American public.

IV. Recommends that the conservation community continue to explore, develop, and assess all proposals for organizational reform of the National Wildlife Refuge System so that effective advocacy for reform may benefit from a broader understanding of the issues.