

# Blue Goose Alliance Bulletin

#36 - February 7, 2004

## **Report of 2004 Annual Meeting - BGA Moving Forward**

The Blue Goose Alliance, at its recent annual meeting at South Padre Island Texas, elected William Reffalt as its new President. Reffalt is a former Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System. He was also the Fish and Wildlife Service's chief architect for the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act that expanded the National Wildlife Refuge System by 54 million acres in 1980. Reffalt, a resident of New Mexico, was among the founders of the Blue Goose Alliance, an organization dedicated to (1) elevating the stature of national wildlife refuges, and the Refuge System, (2) strengthening the integrity of refuges and the Refuge System, and (3) promoting the establishment of the National Wildlife Refuge Service as a separate, sister agency to the FWS within the U.S. Department of the Interior. Reffalt said that, "I believe that being President of the Blue Goose Alliance is a high honor and distinct privilege."

Reffalt's first order of business was to extend high praise and gratitude for the quality and quantity of work that outgoing President, Noreen Clough, performed in service to the mission, objectives, and activities of the Alliance.

Prior to the annual meeting, there was discussion of the need to redefine persons associated with the Alliance. Hence, meeting attendees decided on the following definitions. Persons who subscribe to the Alliance's BlueGooseAlliance forum (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BlueGooseAlliance/>) will be known as "Members." The Working Group will now be known as the Affiliated Working Group, and persons in that group will be known as "Affiliates."

Reffalt told Alliance Affiliates and members that "We can move ahead even in these difficult times, but must develop and implement a program that will facilitate that progress. We have chosen a difficult path because we all believe that our National Wildlife Refuge System must be freed from the constraints and restrictions it now faces within the Fish and Wildlife Service. Changing bureaucratic organizations is among the most thankless tasks in our political system. The necessary work will take time, diligence, and a focused, well planned strategy. We will succeed by working well and working together."

To join President Reffalt in that forward movement in this time of difficult conditions, the attendees at the annual meeting unanimously agreed to initiate a Blue Goose Alliance NWRS Vision project that will describe the NWRS after it becomes a separate agency. Several affiliates volunteered to begin this vital effort, and their product will be available for wider review this spring. The resulting document will describe the outcome of legislation establishing a National Wildlife Refuge Service and raising the National Wildlife Refuge System to a full agency. The Alliance believes this vital step will resolve uncertainties and end some of the conjecture about the effects of its efforts.

To facilitate outreach for support and assistance, the South Padre Island group laid out plans to establish two Alliance Affiliates in each State, or a minimum of 100 nationwide. This is a vital recruitment effort if the Alliance is to have the access and ability to make direct contact with every state delegation in the Congress. While it will

take special efforts and time, new Affiliates will quickly provide increased educational, outreach, and analytical capacities to the organization.

Attendees at the meeting agreed that it should take on carefully selected issues that might have dire effects on the Refuge System if unchecked. Thus, it will look for the Affiliates to assist in analyzing and developing materials and positions on the efforts to contract programs, functions, services, and activities with tribal governments. The Alliance will continue to rely on volunteers to analyze and develop educational and other materials regarding annual appropriations and budgeting for the Refuge System. The Alliance Executive Committee will screen and quickly decide whether to accept new issues as they arise. They are considering taking a position on the possible attempt to transfer the Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

New issues will be screened for compatibility with the Alliance's primary mission, the capability to assist the Alliance in important ways, the ability of the Alliance to be effective in its participation, and the availability of adequate resources to insure that the Alliance can influence the outcome. This will be an important adjunct to the Alliance's primary efforts and will raise its stature and capacity to improve conditions for the Refuge System.

Attendees also discussed a "Game Plan" that will provide ideas and options for taking actions and seeking support from others. It will show how the Alliance will undertake a number of actions and make important progress for its cause, even while facing stalemate in Congress. It will be used as a checklist for planning, recruitment efforts, for making contacts with delegation staff, and for other Affiliate actions. It will be a basic part of an "Affiliate Handbook" that will be complete in the near future. The handbook will provide reference materials to assist work on behalf of the Alliance.

The entire group attending the annual meeting was excited by the possibilities for advancing the Alliance cause in the coming year, and the Board of Directors want to thank those who attended and made the meeting a success this year.