



Fish and Wildlife Service Highlights

Introduction

Since before recorded history, fish and wildlife resources in the United States have been an integral part of human life. We know that the earliest Americans depended on fish and wildlife for both life sustenance and spiritual nourishment. The kinship of aboriginal Americans to these resources is seen today in their religious and cultural activities. The sea turtle is viewed as the symbol of eternal life with the great creator. Salmon and other anadromous fishes were and still are celebrated as symbols of the renewal of life. Wildlife served as the spiritual connection with one's ancestors and the creator of all life.

FWS Mission

"To conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

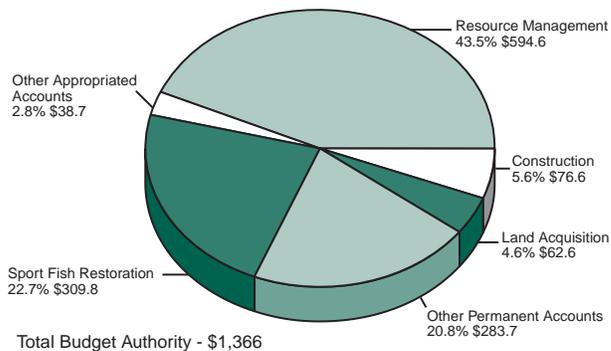
When settlers came to America, they found a land teeming with wildlife. Like Native Americans, they depended on the land's rich wildlife heritage for food and clothing. The new settlers fully intended that freedom to hunt for food and to secure water for life would be the right of all, regardless of heritage or status. The framers of our Constitution recognized this and placed great emphasis on natural rights and natural laws. Because of the American ideal to respect fish and wildlife as a resource available for the use and enjoyment of all, it is revered as a public trust resource—a resource deserving the public's attention and participatory guidance.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service or FWS) has the privilege of being the primary agency responsible for the protection, conservation, and renewal of these resources for this and future generations. As such, the Service provides expert leadership for fish and wildlife conservation that will help provide a healthy environment for fish and wildlife as well as people and that will help Americans understand, conserve, and enjoy the outdoors.

The Work of the Service

By law and treaty, the Service has national and international management and law enforcement responsibilities for migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, fisheries, and many marine mammals. Committed to the conservation of species throughout the Nation and the world, the Service recognizes that human involvement in conservation action is critical to the sustainability of wildlife populations and their habitats. The goal of the Service is to work with the Federal, State, tribal and global communities to form partnerships that conserve fish and wildlife, regardless of political boundaries. For this reason, the work of the Service grows more complex and critical every day.

1998 FWS Budget Authority
(in millions)



Partnerships

Partnerships ensure a unified approach in conserving aquatic and terrestrial environments for the continuing benefit of recreational, commercial, and subsistence interests. In a broader context, these cooperative management efforts benefit aquatic and terrestrial species that depend on healthy aquatic ecosystems. The result is a greater commitment to conservation through internal teamwork and external partnerships.



Plant study (photo by FWS).

To benefit fish and wildlife habitat, the Service forges partnerships among government agencies, private entities, or individuals to restore habitat, improve conservation planning, and provide wetlands data. For example, Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) allow the development of private land while protecting threatened and endangered species and their habitats. Habitat Conservation Plans allow the Service to work with industry, States, communities, and individuals to balance the need for economic growth with the need to protect habitats for vulnerable species. Another important component of habitat protection is the concept of integrated pest management (IPM). Many cooperative IPM efforts bring the Service together with State and local agencies to determine the most effective methods to control vector-borne diseases while minimizing harm to wetlands species and their habitats. In addition, the Service, as part of the Department's National Irrigation Water Quality Program, enters into agreements with State and local water development commissions to eliminate contaminated water and improve poor quality habitat and the biological health of affected species while meeting the needs of the agricultural community. Further, the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration and the Federal Wildlife Restoration Programs, both administered by the Service, have been mainstays of State fish and wildlife resource management efforts and have resulted in significant conservation of fish and wildlife populations and restoration of habitat throughout the Nation.

Many of the Nation's and the world's native fish and wildlife populations are declining or are at historic low levels due to habitat degradation, introduction of nonindigenous species, poor land management practices, or urbanization. In partnership with other Federal, State, tribal, and international governments, as well as a variety of private interests, the Service is contributing to the restoration, enhancement, and protection of nationally and internationally significant fish and wildlife resources and ecosystems. Service biologists contribute technical expertise and resources to cooperative efforts that result in on-the-ground conservation actions that benefit fish and wildlife species throughout the world. For example, the Service contributes to Partners in Flight regional conservation plans that offer local land managers and other decisionmakers a "road map" of actions that need to be taken to preserve the rich diversity of bird life in the United States. In addition, work with international partners in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan has resulted in a long-term strategy to protect and restore habitat throughout the continent for waterfowl and other wildlife that use wetlands. Further, the Service supports the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which has resulted in the recognition that international commercial trade in live plant and animal specimens can lead to disastrous introductions of alien species into new habitats, resulting in the decline of resident populations. CITES work brought added protection to the sturgeon through the cooperation of the major caviar exporting countries of Russia and Iran. The United States, once one of the largest ivory consumers in the world, demonstrated its concern for African elephants through the African Elephant Conservation Act sponsored by CITES.

Stewardship

As a land manager, the Service provides stewardship for lands in all 50 States, some of the Pacific Islands, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and Puerto Rico. The Service manages over 93 million acres in the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), which includes 516 refuge units, 199 Waterfowl Production Areas, and 50 coordination areas. Lands managed within the NWRS are used to conserve and manage fish, wildlife, and plant resources for the benefit of present and future generations. The habitat protected is as diverse as the wild things living there. Service stewardship lands protect tundra, grasslands, deserts, forests, rivers, marshes, swamps, and remote islands—virtually every type of habitat and landscape found in the United States. The fish and wildlife that live on refuges are the heritage of a wild America. The Service watches over 700 kinds of birds, 220 mammals, 250 reptiles and amphibians, and 200 kinds of fish. They come as flocks, herds, coveys, gaggles, schools, pairs, and loners. More than 255 threatened and endangered species are found on Service lands, and it is on refuges and in hatcheries that they often begin their recovery and hold their own against extinction.



FWS employee with with red wolf pups (photo by George Gentry).

Stewardship of the Nation's fishery and aquatic resources, through the National Fish Hatchery System (NFHS), has been a core responsibility of the Service for over 120 years. Although the Service does not own all the lands and facilities in the NFHS, the Service participates in managing units within the NFHS, which is composed of National Fish Hatcheries, Fish Health Centers, and Fish Technology Centers. Lands and facilities within the NFHS comprise 67 hatcheries located within 34 States and 16 other fish facilities located throughout the United States.

Recreation and Training

In addition to conservation, restoration, and management of fish and wildlife resources and their habitats, the NWRS and the NFHS provide recreational opportunities to the public, including fishing, hunting, hiking, and birdwatching. Because of the public's growing interest in fish and wildlife and natural resource conservation, the Service is responding with increased emphasis on environmental education. The Service strives to ensure that its employees deliver consistent, effective conservation messages to the public and the conservation community. Through its new National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia, the Service has trained thousands of conservation professionals representing over 100 different organizations and 20 countries.

The Service has a proud tradition of working with its partners throughout the Nation and the world to effect solutions that benefit fish and wildlife resources and the habitat upon which they depend for survival. In 1998, as in every other year before, the Service has enjoyed the increasing support of the Congress, the President, and the American public so that we can all work to benefit our natural heritage. We look forward to continuing to build and nurture new and existing cooperative programs so that fish and wildlife management remains a useful and productive tool for conserving our valued fish and wildlife resources for future generations.