

*Wildlife and Hunting Heritage
Conservation Council*

September 12, 2011

Dan Ashe, Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dan,

I just wanted to drop you a short note thanking you again for inviting me, other members of the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council (WHHCC) and members of the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (SFBPC) to the August 8th meeting to discuss our concerns with the National Wildlife Refuge Vision document. I felt the meeting was very productive and, more importantly, the Service responded to our concerns in the most recent version of the Vision document.

The concerns of both the WHHCC and the SFBPC track very closely on the Vision document, and the September 7th letter (attached) to Greg from the SFBPC commenting on the most recent Vision iteration reflects our views as well.

The Council looks forward to continuing its productive engagement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System as we move into the critical “implementation” phase of the Vision process.

Sincerely,



John Tomke, Chair
Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council

Cc:
Greg Siekaniec
Jim Kurth
Cynthia Martinez

attachment

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Mr. Gregory Siekaniec
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SEP 07 2011

Dear Greg,

It was a real pleasure to have you at our Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council meeting last week in San Francisco. Your participation was truly appreciated and we are excited to be working with you and Director Ashe on Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) program and policy issues which are so important to America's recreational anglers and boaters. Council members are pleased that both you and Director Ashe not only bring a career FWS background to your current leadership positions, but also that you both bring your strong personal backgrounds as recreational anglers, boaters and hunters to bear on your day to day work.

One of the items discussed at the meeting last week was the revised National Wildlife Refuge System Vision document which was the subject of a meeting of FWS staff and representatives of both the SFBPC and the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council back on August 8, 2011. On behalf of the membership of the SFBPC, I would like to thank you, Director Ashe and the other FWS staff in attendance for the constructive discussion, and your willingness to revise the draft Vision based on that meeting.

The full SFBPC membership reviewed feedback provided by Ms. Cynthia Martinez and we are heartened by the many positive revisions. We believe that the revised document is much stronger, however, members did note 3 areas that would benefit from further modification. We offer these suggestions in the section entitled "Vision suggestions."

Based on the August 29 letter from Ms. Martinez and your comments at the Council meeting last week, we realize that the FWS is moving rapidly to finalize the Refuge Vision and begin its implementation. The SFBPC stands ready to assist in the implementation process in any way feasible. The SFBPC has a long history of working at the request of the FWS to assist in addressing program and policy issues which benefit both the Nation's aquatic resources, and the recreational opportunities which they provide.

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This function is also spelled out in its charter. The Refuge System and its future focus being laid out in the Vision document certainly represent such an opportunity. Given the quick progress toward Vision implementation, we would also like to take this opportunity to make a few suggestions for consideration as part of the implementation planning process. We offer these suggestions in the section entitled "Refuge Vision implementation plan suggestions."

In closing, we hope this last bit of SFBPC feedback will help you finalize the Refuge Vision document. We look forward to continuing the strong relationship between the SFBPC and the FWS by providing assistance in your efforts to implement the Refuge Vision for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Dammrich", written in a cursive style.

Thomas J. Dammrich
Chairman

Attachment

Cc: Dan Ashe
Jim Kurth
Cynthia Martinez
Elizabeth Stevens

ATTACHMENT:

1) Vision suggestions:

At our August 8 meeting, there were several areas of the draft Vision which we discussed which warranted some additional attention. One of the major items was clarifying and more specifically referencing the North American Model, and specifically the funding mechanisms for the model. The revised draft is much stronger on this topic.

However, we suggest that the description of the American System of Conservation Funding be modified on page 5. The language below clarifies the relationship of the Duck Stamp to the funding model. It also more specifically points to the relationship between the creation of boating infrastructure and access to Refuge lands and waters.

“Over the last 75 years, the hunting and angling conservation community has supported passage of specific legislation which has formed the foundation for fish and wildlife conservation efforts today. The American System of Conservation Funding is collectively supported by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, passed in 1937, and the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, passed in 1950. These pieces of legislation have continued to generate funds, through excise taxes on sporting goods, such as firearms, ammunition and archery equipment, and on fishing equipment and motorboat fuel, to exclusively support and provide important revenue streams for the state fish and wildlife agencies that professionally manage the majority of our nation’s fish and wildlife populations and provide access for sportsmen and other outdoor enthusiasts to these natural resources. Through these programs, the American System of Conservation Funding has provided more than \$10 billion for on-the-ground conservation activities benefitting species that use refuge lands.

In addition, another significant source of federal revenue primarily generated by conservationists is the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (also known as the Federal Duck Stamp), of which 98 percent of every Duck Stamp dollar is spent directly on purchasing land for the Refuge System. Nearly \$25 million is raised annually and more than \$750 million has been generated during the past seven decades, largely from waterfowl hunters.

Recreational boaters have joined hunters and anglers in contributing to the American System of Conservation Funding and assisting in enhancing access to our public lands and waters, including Refuge lands and waters, through the creation and maintenance of boat ramps and other infrastructure. In addition to the recreational opportunities afforded to the public, these programs are also essential for Refuge Managers, law enforcement and other professional fish and wildlife managers in fulfilling their duties.”

One other area that was discussed on August 8, and which has been addressed in the revised draft, is the issue of a separation between traditional conservation organizations from a more broadly defined conservation community. To avoid this appearance we suggest the following for insertion on page 1:

“Since its inception a century ago, the National Wildlife Refuge System has cultivated partnerships within the conservation community, with the primary purpose of conserving and restoring species and habitats for both consumptive and non-consumptive users. The National Wildlife Refuge System is both a product and a component of the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation and embodies the two core concepts of wildlife held in the public trust and managing sustainable populations.”

In a similar vein, on page 9 we suggest the following (The reference to conserving is consistent with earlier verbiage in that section of the draft Vision and with the Refuge systems mission.)

“To help conserve our valued ecosystems that sustain us, we must undertake immediate but thoughtful, scientifically-based and proactive conservation planning, design and delivery in the management of America’s national wildlife refuges.”

The draft Vision speaks to the utility of expanding fishing and hunting opportunities on Refuge lands. We suggest a slight modification to recommendations 17 and 18. This language gives the FWS the opportunity to work with a broader set of partners, including FWS federal advisory committees, to conduct the program review and expand recreational opportunities, if helpful.

Recommendation 17: The Service will work closely with state fish and wildlife agencies, other governmental bodies (including the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council and the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council) and conservation organizations to conduct a review of its current hunting and fishing opportunities. Based on this evaluation, the Service and states will work cooperatively to prepare a strategy for increasing quality hunting and fishing opportunities on national wildlife refuges. Specific opportunities to be addressed include, but are not limited, to those currently offered to youth and people with disabilities.

Recommendation 18: Support and enhance appropriate recreational opportunities on national wildlife refuges by partnering with state fish and wildlife agencies, other governmental bodies (including the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council and the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council), conservation organizations, and businesses. Task these and other partner organizations with evaluating and updating relevant policies and infrastructure.

Finally, although the August 29 FWS response notes references to the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, the North American Waterfowl Management plan and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, we could not locate the reference in the revised Vision document.

2) Refuge Vision implementation plan suggestions:

1) Suggest that per their charters and executive orders, which further delineate the roles of the respective councils, both the SFBPC and the WHHCC would be useful tools for the FWS to engage in the conduct of the program review recommended in recommendation 17 (i.e., review of its current hunting and fishing opportunities.)

2) Similar to the above, both the SFBPC and WHHCC could serve to assist in the implementation of recommendation 18.

3) Suggest that the environmental education strategy envisioned in recommendation 20 include as part of the "basic standards for all refuges", include interpretive materials and programs with information about the historic importance of the North American Model, the role that recreational anglers, boaters and hunters play in funding conservation through the purchase of licenses and equipment (also known as the American System of Conservation Funding), and their role in the acquisition of refuge lands through the purchase of the Federal "Duck Stamp".

4) Suggest that the development, training and mentoring of Refuge System employees should reflect the full breadth of management activities supported through the North American Model, to include the contributions of recreational hunters, anglers, and boaters through the American System of Conservation Funding. Training courses should also focus on managing quality hunting and fishing programs on Refuge lands.