

C. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages a system of 540 national wildlife refuges comprising over 95 million acres and 69 national fish hatcheries which cover approximately 21,500 acres. These areas are located in all 50 states and some island territories. They are managed principally to conserve fish and wildlife, but they also provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, if compatible with refuge purposes and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Wildlife-dependent recreation includes such activities as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, interpretation, and environmental education.

During FY 2002, the FWS had a total of 104 units approved for the Fee Demo Program. During the year, the Service's Fee Demo sites collected \$3.6 million. The Service collected fees both for entrance and use. Entrance fees permit visitor entry into the refuge and often cover the use of all public areas and facilities within the refuge. Use fees include boat launches, guided tours, photo blinds, hunting blinds, and meeting room use.

FWS guidelines determine how Fee Demo revenues are to be spent. These guidelines require that revenues be spent on maintenance, enhancing visitor services, resource protection, and cost of collection. In FY 2002, the FWS used fee demo revenues to improve and enhance visitor services and facilities such as boat docks, launching ramps, wildlife observation towers, information kiosks, exhibits, signs, brochures, trail guides and maintenance backlog reduction, in addition to covering the costs of fee collection. The FWS allows regional offices to determine how much of the revenues collected above the 80 percent level are retained at the collecting site. Region 1 (Pacific Northwest), Region 3 (Upper Midwest), Region 6 (Mountain States), and Region 7 (Alaska), all return 100 percent of the funding to the stations that collected the fees. Regions 2 (Southwest), 4 (Southeast) and 5 (Northeast) retain 20 percent of the fee revenues collected. The retained monies are used to assist new sites with any start-up costs as they enter the Fee Demo Program.

Visitation

The numbers of visitors increased from 14.6 million in FY 2001 to 16.1 million in FY 2002, an increase of 9 percent. Most of the FWS's participating sites are national wildlife refuges, which are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge system will celebrate its Centennial in March 2003, and the Service anticipates higher visitation in the coming year.

Costs of Collection

Costs of collection decreased in FY 2002, declining from 24.8 percent of revenues in FY 2001 to 19.3 percent of revenues in FY 2002. FWS guidelines establish a goal of 20% for cost of collections. However, some sites still have costs of collection that are above the 20 percent goal. In some cases, this is due to revenues being deposited after the cut-off date for the Treasury report. In other cases, the station counted partial salaries that are actually paid from another account. All else equal, higher revenues would reduce the percentage for cost of collection. However, many stations reported lower than expected hunting numbers. This may be partially due to the events of September 11, 2001, as well as last year's drought. Lower numbers of hunters does necessarily lower costs for the hunt program. Hunts that many of the refuges host are staff intensive and cannot be administered by volunteers.

Cooperative Efforts

The Environmental Education Center at Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona, serves as an esthetic and inspirational site for interagency meetings and includes accommodations for groups performing services on and for the refuge. Within the refuge, Brown Canyon was the site for two week-long work groups of Sierra Club members from across the U.S. Visits by high school and university groups further the environmental education exchange efforts between the refuge and schools.

Mason Neck NWR, in Virginia, puts its hunter permit fees into the fee demonstration program. The Refuge deer hunt is operated with the full cooperation and input of refuge personnel, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Mason Neck State Park. The three agencies share facilities and staff to provide services to the public with minimal duplication of effort. The refuge has established a list of 5 cooperating ranges (3 private, one local government, and 1 NGO) that provide range certification for the hunters, using local resources rather than refuge staff to provide certification. Many other hunts in Northern Virginia use this list and have based their hunter qualifications on the refuge's example.

The Nisqually NWR in Washington partnered with the Washington Conservation Corps to place an Americorps member at the refuge as an environmental education coordinator. This person manages the education program that serves over 6,000 students annually. The coordinator holds teacher workshops, coordinates student field trips, and manages volunteers who work at the Environmental Education Center.

Parker River NWR in Massachusetts worked cooperatively with the Friends of Parker River, a local organization which supports the refuge's mission. By working together, the refuge's annual May Plover Festival and the Rachel Carson Play were very successful popular events which helped to educate the public on the National Wildlife Refuge System and its mission. These well-attended events promoted positive public relations which will have positive residual effects for years to come.

Program Performance Measures

The FWS has established two GPRA goals with respect to recreation activities. These include:

- Long-Term Goal 3.3 -- By 2005, 90 percent of National Wildlife Refuge visitors are satisfied with the quality of their recreational/educational experience.
- Annual Performance Goal 3.3.1 – By September 30, 2003, the Service will have completed and analyzed a national visitor satisfaction survey on National Wildlife Refuges.

In late summer of FY 2002, the Service conducted an extensive visitor satisfaction survey at 45 refuges located nationwide. The results showed 90 percent of those responding were satisfied or very satisfied with their recreational/educational experience. The Service plans to follow up with another sampling at refuges with lower visitation to determine if this number is truly representative as a baseline.

Since 28 of the surveyed refuges were in the Fee Demo Program, the survey included two fee questions regarding individual's perceptions about fee levels. Results indicated that 94 percent of

respondents who paid fees thought they were about right or even too low. Findings also showed that the fee did not restrict visitation, and that nearly 90 percent of visitors felt strongly that the refuge provided them with an excellent value.

Centennial preparations – Celebrating a Century of Conservation

Most of the sites in the Service’s fee demonstration program are National Wildlife Refuges. All refuges are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System which celebrates its centennial in 2003, commemorating the date that President Theodore Roosevelt created our first refuge at Pelican Island in Florida on March 14, 1903. In preparation for centennial celebrations, many refuges used some of their fee demonstration collections to purchase banners and new signage for special events. Region 5, headquartered in Hadley, MA, decided to use the 20 percent fee demonstration collections that its Regional Office manages for centennial-related projects throughout the Region. These funds went to purchase time capsules for each refuge, flags for the centennial celebrations to be used at Pelican Island NWR, and centennial exhibits for use at special events year-round.

Alaska

- Kodiak NWR rents cabins for visitor use and deposits the cabin rental fees into the fee demonstration program. Annually, these fees pay for much of the needed maintenance to the refuge’s cabins. In FY 2002, the refuge completed upgrades and repairs to the Little River Cabin, the North Frazer Cabin and the South Frazer Cabin. This work included painting the cabins and related outbuildings and equipment, installing drying racks for meat, cleaning the cabins and related outbuildings, replacing broken windows, and conducting safety inspections. (See photos)



Arizona

- Buenos Aires NWR completed a variety of projects with its fee demonstration collections. These included upgrading furnishings and completing maintenance work in the Environmental Education Center and other structures; creating slide transparencies for public presentations, hunt brochures, and honorariums for volunteer who lead NWR Week guided walks; purchasing items for volunteers and for Centennial-promoting events; and buying new format entrance signs to better welcome visitors and improve the visual appeal of the refuge entrance.

California

- Humboldt Bay NWR used its fee demonstration revenues to rehabilitate refuge roads and trails; repair its hunter check station; and initiate replacement of its shop and maintenance area.
- Modoc NWR used its fee demonstration monies to remodel office space in order to provide a small visitor center/display area. This remodel converted existing office space into an area for interpretive displays and improved contact with Refuge personnel. The Refuge also

replaced a disabled access hunting blind, replacing the old hay bale blind which was used for disabled hunters with a new wooden blind, complete with access ramp. In addition, the Refuge purchased a banner and materials for its Centennial outreach.



- Sacramento NWR purchased shirts for its volunteers, printed a variety of Refuge brochures, and maintained its visitor facilities with fee demonstration dollars.

Florida

- Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee NWR used a portion of its fee revenues to cover the maintenance costs for clearing over 5 miles of its canoe trail. Fee revenues were also spent on the annual Everglades Awareness Day. This free festival explores the history of the Everglades using period characters, interactive exhibits, songs, animals and more. In addition, some fee money was devoted to upgrading and improving the refuge's Web page and computer equipment.
- Hobe Sound NWR improved both safety and comfort at the Refuge with its fee collections by rehabilitating a dilapidated boat dock and installing a new restroom at its beach site. The Refuge also upgraded the landscaping for the step path to the inlet shore line.
- J. N. "Ding" Darling NWR on Sanibel Island purchased an automated space/parking permit dispenser or fee machine. The refuge also made improvements both inside and out at its Education Center, purchased new entrance signs, and purchased new binoculars and spotting scopes for the overlook tower.
- Lower Suwannee NWR used fee demonstration monies to replace its River Trail informational kiosk. Refuge staff completed this project for less than half the amount allocated for this project. The Refuge also: constructed another informational kiosk for its Dixie Mainline Interpretive Auto Tour route; created Environmental Education trunks for teachers; purchased environmental education supplies; and developed educational programs.

Georgia

- After almost 30 years of handling wilderness canoe reservations manually, Okefenokee NWR automated its reservation system with the help of fee demonstration money. The Refuge plans

to make the information available on the Internet so canoeists can see which canoe trails are already booked. In partnership with a private landowner, the Refuge developed a walking trail. The private landowner furnished signs for the trail. The Refuge rebuilt one overnight wilderness canoe shelter and completed rehabilitation work on another shelter.

Massachusetts

- Parker River NWR completed a variety of projects with its fee demonstration money. It helped fund projects through the Youth Conservation Corps, including the construction of a bird observation blind that will facilitate public access. Fee demonstration collections also paid for some much-needed maintenance work including the purchase of a snow plow for maintaining refuge roads, a restroom cleaning contract, restroom supplies, septic pumping, electrical repair, roto-rooter work, lumber for repair and construction of Refuge facilities such as an observation deck, paint and tools, and safety equipment for Youth Conservation Corps employees. Fee revenues also purchased outreach materials for the Refuge's annual Plover Festival in May and covered the costs of printing Refuge brochures. Fee revenues also helped fund the production of a play about one of the Service's most prized past employees, Rachel Carson.

Mississippi

- St. Catherine Creek NWR completed important maintenance projects using fee demonstration money. It replaced deteriorated signs, repaired two deer check stations used in its hunt program, upgraded its telephone system and printed brochures, permits, environmental education posters, and other brochures.

Montana

- Fee revenues funded dust control on the Refuge's 19-mile scenic drive. Dust was the number one complaint of visitors until four years ago when the Refuge started applying some of its fee money to this project. Visitors enjoy improved visibility, even when there are numerous cars on the road. The National Bison Range used a portion of its fee money to do outreach at the Montana Environmental Education Association Conference. The Refuge set up a table exhibit at the Conference and distributed literature and other information about Montana refuges, as well as about the National Wildlife Refuge System and its upcoming centennial celebration.

Nebraska

- Fort Niobrara NWR repaired gravel erosion on six public use boat launch sites with its fee demonstration collections. The Refuge also used fee revenues to repair vandalism to boat launch parking signs and entrance signs.

North Carolina

- Pee Dee NWR helped improve visitor safety by upgrading the radio systems in its law enforcement vehicles with some of its fee demonstration collections. The Refuge also refurbished an abandoned nature trail and incorporated the new trail with an existing one to make a loop trail that is more accessible to visitors. Pee Dee NWR also printed new public use brochures and fishing brochures for the Refuge, and built gravel parking lots for hunters and other visitors which included appropriate signage.

South Dakota

- The Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery used its fee demonstration funds to print brochures, upgrade lighting, improve landscaping, and purchase light-duty maintenance equipment.

Texas

- Work continued on the surfacing of the Big Tree Trail with crushed granite making it more accessible. Volunteers helped complete a majority of the work. A grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department funded a portion of this road project. Fee demonstration dollars also helped fund the renovation of the men's restroom in the Claude Lard Visitor Center. The project included the installation of new fixtures and additional lighting. Because the existing restroom was not big enough to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, a new accessible unisex restroom was built adjacent to the women's restroom. Aransas NWR used some of its fee demonstration collections for the 2nd Annual Refuge Day Celebration on October 13, 2001 with approximately 2,600 visitors in attendance. Visitors were treated to wildlife related demonstrations, exhibits, and seminars.
- McFaddin NWR used its fee demonstration monies to hire a contractor to clean out its hunter access ditches. The ditches are essential for boat access to a portion of the Refuge. The ditches had not been cleaned out for several years and were almost impassable. The Refuge also used fee money to develop and print hunting permits with Refuge maps in them.
- Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge constructed a fee collection booth to ensure quality service for visitors entering the station.



Virginia

- Back Bay NWR used its fee revenues to add roof gutters and down spouts to the Asheville Bridge Creek Environmental Education Center. Monies also supported the Refuge's Youth Conservation Corps projects; funded printing of the Refuge brochure and other printing costs; and helped pay for janitorial/grounds maintenance work at Refuge headquarters.
- At Chincoteague NWR Fee Demo revenues assisted in funding the renovation of the Marsh Trail observation platform and replaced worn out signs throughout the Refuge. In addition, fee revenues helped fund a satellite telemetry study for the Atlantic Brant (a species of migratory waterfowl) to track migration patterns. Information from the study was placed on the Refuge's website. Chincoteague is one of the Service's most visited refuges and also one of its top fee revenue producers.
- Mason Neck and Occoquan Bay NWRs of the Potomac River NWR Complex spent their fee demonstration dollars on a variety of important projects. In preparation for the annual hunt, the Complex serviced over 8 miles of road and trails. Visitors engaging in wildlife

observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation also benefitted from these repairs. Mason Neck NWR accommodated some 1,288 hunter visits, representing approximately 4,000 activity hours of recreation. Refuge staff provided an orientation, a detailed map, and hunting regulations to all hunters.

Wyoming

- Seedskadee NWR used its fee demonstration collections to purchase boat identification stickers, outreach materials, and display items for its visitor center. Fees also addressed maintenance and safety needs by providing potable water for the visitor center and emergency telephone service for the Refuge's bunkhouse used by volunteers and temporary staff.