

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



John G. Rogers, Acting Director
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Habitat Conservation Plans

Clean Vessel Act Victories

Patricia Fisher

The Fish and Wildlife Service has announced \$9.4 million in grants awarded under the 1992 Clean Vessel Act to help 35 state conservation agencies encourage recreational boaters to bring boat sewage to shore. The states will match the federal grants by contributing \$2.4 million for projects to install 600 additional pumpout stations and 400 dump stations, for boater awareness campaigns, and for technical assistance and maintenance programs.

Now in its fifth and final year of funding, the program has awarded \$40 million (including the 1997 grants) to 49 states to install more than 2,200 pumpout stations and 1,400 dump facilities nationwide.

"The Clean Vessel Act has received high marks for improving the health of America's waterways," said Acting Service Director **John Rogers**. "Thanks to a total team effort of federal, state, and private partners, the program has achieved remarkable results in just five years." In conjunction with other clean water initiatives, the program provides this country's boaters, anglers, and other water-sports enthusiasts with a pollution-free and healthy environment. It also helps ensure disease-free shellfish for human consumption.

For the first time in decades, Rhode Island now allows shellfishing in the waters around Block Island. Using program money, the state alerted boaters to the health risks associated with dumping human waste directly into the water and installed accessible pumpout stations.

The program also has served as a catalyst in bringing together federal, state, local, and private groups to enhance the protection of the Midwest's St. Croix River, now hailed as one of the cleanest river systems in the United States. A portion of the riverway lies within an hour's drive of the 2.4 million residents of the Minneapolis-St. Paul.

Because of heavy usage, the amount of boat sewage dumped into the St. Croix River was, in large measure, to blame for the river's deterioration. The Minnesota and Wisconsin departments of natural resources, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, local governments, and the outdoor recreation community banded together to provide adequate pumpout and dump facilities.

"The successful clean-up of the St. Croix River and its return as a premier site for outdoor recreation came about because people worked together to make it happen," Rogers said. The Environmental Protection Agency recently recognized the extraordinary success of this joint effort by designating the St. Croix River system a "no discharge area."

Funding for the Clean Vessel Act comes from the Sport Fish Restoration Account of the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund, commonly known as the Wallop-Breaux Fund. Monies in that fund are derived from a 10 percent excise tax on fishing equipment and a 3-percent tax on electric trolling motors and sonar fish finders, a portion of the Federal fuels tax, and import duties on fishing tackle and pleasure boats.

FWS Awards \$6 Million to States in First Pilot Program

Ken Burton

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has awarded \$2.7 million to California, Texas, Florida, and Utah under the first pilot program to help states acquire lands that support habitat conservation plans. Allocations of \$1 million will go to Texas, \$750,000 to Utah, and \$500,000 each to California and Florida. Distribution of the remainder of the \$6 million Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Fund will be announced later.



John Rogers

"I'm always delighted when we can improve on a success story," said Interior **Secretary Bruce Babbitt**, "and that's what this pilot program is about. When this Administration took office, we had 14 working Habitat Conservation Plans on the books. Today, there are 197, with 200 more being developed. The conservation plans today are enjoying tremendous acceptance by states, the business community, and private landowners all across the country. They clearly demonstrate how well the public and private sectors can work together. These plans are a model for conservation and open space planning for the future."

Habitat Conservation Plans are voluntary agreements drawn up by private landowners and local or state agencies, if applicable, which enable a given project to go forward on land used by endangered or threatened species, as long as the project minimizes and mitigates the impact to these species. The plan further acknowledges that some individuals of a species may be lost "in the pursuit of otherwise lawful activities," but ensures that the greater population will benefit. The specific projects

Manatee Populations Rebound

Diana Hawkins

The Florida manatee is rebounding from 1996's disastrous die-off, but avoidable, human-related deaths still haunt this gentle aquatic mammal. In January 1996, a survey conducted by the Florida Marine Research Institute counted 2,639 manatees, the highest number since statewide surveys began in 1991. However, 1996 was also a record year for manatee mortalities, with the death toll reaching 416 in the United States.

One hundred and fifty-one of these deaths were caused by a naturally occurring toxin produced by the red tide organism, *Gymnodinium breve*. While that contributed significantly to the total number of deaths recorded, 1996 was also the worst year on record for human-related mortalities. Sixty manatees were killed by watercraft, ten died in water control structures, and one drowned in a stormwater pipe.



Secretary Babbitt surveys land proposed for a Habitat Conservation Plan. Photo by Tami Heilemann

funded by these first grants are:

Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (Texas: \$1 million) is a regional Habitat Conservation Plan that protects 35 listed and candidate species, including the golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo and six invertebrates, among others, in Travis County.

Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan (Utah: \$750,000) covers 34 listed and candidate species, including the desert tortoise, peregrine falcon and the American bald eagle.

Orange County Coastal Central Habitat Conservation Plan (California: \$500,000) covers the gnatcatcher, peregrine falcon, southwestern willow flycatcher, and 34 other rare species.

Volusia County Habitat Conservation Plan (Florida: \$500,000) is a county plan to protect nesting sea turtles.

The pilot program, established under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act, provides that money may be obligated to appropriate state agencies but the funds must be used for specific land acquisitions that support Habitat Conservation Plans in which either states or territories are involved as partners. The funds do not supplant private sector or local government responsibilities required for mitigation during implementation of Habitat Conservation Plans.



A Manatee calf suckles at its mother's side. FWS photo

Despite this bad news, the Fish and Wildlife Service reported a total of 2,229 manatees during 1997's first survey: 900 on Florida's east coast and 1,329 on the Gulf of Mexico coast. These data are encouraging, said Southeast Regional Director **Noreen Clough**, because this count is a record high for the Gulf coast and occurs in spite of last year's killing red tide.

The Service, Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, and other private conservation organizations are continuing recovery activities to protect manatee habitats and reduce human-related mortality. Clough said that ongoing efforts include establishing manatee protection zones to reduce watercraft-related deaths, installing grates to decrease structure-related drownings, and using pressure-sensitive devices to open canal gates and cut water-control-structure-related deaths.

Industry-Government Cooperation "For the Birds"

James C. Lewis,
Region 2 Whooping Crane Coordinator

Many birds die annually as a result of collisions or electrocution when they contact power lines. In 1989, government and industry groups joined in a cooperative effort to address these problems. The Avian Power Line Interaction Committee then chose southern Colorado's San Luis Valley, where abundant power lines support irrigation, as the focus for their initial activities.



Nine endangered whooping cranes (*Grus americana*) had been killed or injured when they collided with lines in this valley between 1981 and 1989. The Committee first evaluated techniques of marking lines to increase visibility and reduce collisions. Sandhill cranes (*G. canadensis*) provided an abundant research substitute for the whooping crane. The research also included ducks (primarily mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*), raptors, shorebirds, and other birds abundant in the vicinity of Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge.

The testing team tried yellow fiberglass hanging plates and yellow spiral vibration dampers as markers. Dampers are plastic twisted around the



In 1994, the Committee published *Mitigating Bird Collisions With Power Lines: The State of the Art in 1994*, which has been widely distributed to utility companies and state and federal agencies. This 100-page bulletin describes approaches to assessing and solving the problem

wires to reduce wind vibration. These markers reduced collisions by 40 to 60 percent but the plates caused line abrasion. A new marker developed in Europe seems to incorporate the benefits of both plates and dampers. Marking techniques can benefit a wide variety of birds, including endangered species like whooping cranes, California condors (*Gymnogyps californianus*), brown pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*), and wood storks (*Mycteria americana*).

In 1992, the Committee sponsored an international workshop to discuss methods for reducing the impact of electric power lines, towers, poles, and other structures on avian populations. More than 100 engineers, scientists, and representatives of conservation and special interest groups from ten countries attended the International Workshop on Avian Interactions With Utility Structures. The published proceedings included 28 papers discussing a range of issues, including conservation, economics, engineering, and research.

In 1994, the Committee published *Mitigating Bird Collisions With Power Lines:*

of bird collisions. The Committee also developed a 20-minute training video to complement the publication.



In cooperation with the Service's Office of Training and Education, the Committee in 1995 provided a 2-day training course entitled Reducing Bird Collisions And Electrocutions. The course reviewed engineering, biological, and environmental factors involved in avian collisions and electrocutions. Participants learned management approaches and techniques to assess, reduce, and prevent conflicts between birds and electrical facilities. A companion 148-page publication, *Suggested Practices For Raptor Protection On Power Lines: The State Of The Art In 1996* reported the latest techniques for reducing bird electrocutions caused by electric utility structures.

The Committee is an excellent example of how government and private industry together can address conservation issues. Members of the Committee include: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Edison Electric Institute, Central and Southwest Services of Texas, Florida Power and Light Company, Idaho Power Company, Nebraska Public Power District, Pacific Gas and Electric Company of California, PacifiCorp of Oregon, Public Service Power Company of Colorado, Salt River Project of Arizona, Southern California Edison, Virginia Power, and Bonneville Power Authority of Oregon.

The Voice of America's Anglers and Boaters:

The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council

Janet Tennyson

A small group representing the interests of America's 50 million anglers and 75 million boaters is working at the highest levels of government to safeguard and enhance their outdoor pastimes.

The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council, established three years ago, is made up of representatives of state natural resource agencies; the fishing and boating industries and associations; and experts in resource conservation, recreation, and public outreach. It provides recommendations on government policies affecting recreational fishing and boating to the Interior Secretary through the Fish and Wildlife Service director.

"The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council forms a sturdy bridge between anglers and boaters and the policies that affect their sports," said Acting Director Rogers. "Working with the council, the Service has taken several steps to improve America's recreational fisheries and aquatic systems."

The council's first major accomplishment was the Recreational Fisheries Stewardship Initiative, outlining significant threats to recreational fisheries and aquatic systems and providing several specific proposals to combat them.

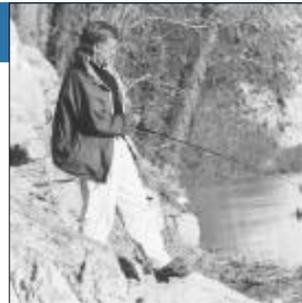
Early in 1995, the council recommended a policy to improve administration of the Endangered Species Act as it relates to recreational fisheries. This recommendation was based on angler concerns about conflicts between traditional fisheries management, including stocking of non-native sportfish, and endangered species recovery efforts.

While this policy was being drafted, the council was working on what has proven to be its biggest accomplishment to date: President Clinton's Executive Order 12962 on Recreational Fisheries, signed in June 1995. The Order's two major requirements were to establish an endangered species-recreational fisheries policy and a comprehensive fisheries conservation plan to guide federal agencies in improving recreational fisheries and fishing opportunities.

Seven Cabinet-level agencies presented the Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan at

a gathering of state fishery chiefs, conservation leaders, outdoor writers, and fishing and boating industry representatives during National Fishing Week in June 1996. The Service and the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service also announced the endangered species-recreational fisheries policy at that time. Under the policy, the Service is working to maximize fishing opportunities while addressing the needs of endangered species in such areas as the Colorado River, New England rivers, and the Columbia River.

While the conservation plan outlined general guidelines for improving recreational fisheries, federal agencies involved in aquatic resource management are developing specific plans outlining future efforts in this area. The council will evaluate federal agencies' progress under these plans.



Secretary Babbitt enjoys a brief respite of recreational fishing along a Northern Virginia stream. Photo by Tami Heilemann

Polar Bear Trophy Regulations

Patricia Fisher

The Fish and Wildlife Service announced that polar bear trophies from five populations in the Northwest Territories can be imported by permit under specific circumstances. The regulations also apply to polar bears taken from approved populations prior to the 1994 amendments of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The approved populations are Southern Beaufort Sea, Northern Beaufort Sea, McClintock Channel, Viscount Melville Sound, and Western Hudson Bay.

The act gives the Secretary of the Interior authority to issue importation permits for polar bear trophies (other than internal organs) provided specific requirements are met. These include the determination that Canada has a monitored and enforced sport-hunting program, that populations are maintained at a sustainable level, and that any actions are consistent with the purposes of the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears.

At this time, the Service does not have sufficient information to make findings for Gulf of Boothia, Queen Elizabeth Island, Foxe Basin, Parry Channel, Baffin Bay, Southern Hudson Bay, and Davis Strait populations. Canada is collecting data on these populations. Upon receipt of



substantial new scientific or management data on the overall sport-hunting program for any of these populations, the Service will consult with the Marine Mammal Commission, solicit public comments, and evaluate whether a population meets the criteria. Until that time, permits cannot be issued for bears sport-hunted from these areas, including those taken prior to 1994.

The Service estimates it will take 60-90 days to process a permit application, including a 30-day Federal Register notice for each application as required by the act. The agency will charge the standard \$25 permit processing fee. When an importation permit application is approved, the applicant must pay a \$1,000 permit issuance fee. The funds are to be used for the conservation of polar bear populations shared between the U.S. and Russia as stipulated by the act.