

Blue Goose Alliance Bulletin

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Alliance Member Speaks at Regional Refuge Conference

Recently, Phil Morgan, Blue Goose Alliance member and Georgia resident, was invited by the Fish and Wildlife Service to join a leadership panel at a regional refuge manager's conference in Florida. Phil was asked to make a presentation on the Blue Goose Alliance. Below is the text of Phil's comments.

THE BLUE GOOSE ALLIANCE

Comments of Phillip S. Morgan
to the Refuge Managers Regional Conference
Orlando, Florida, February 1, 2001

As a member of this leadership panel, I appreciate being invited to share with you the mission of the Blue Goose Alliance and some of its plans to achieve its single goal. While I am enjoying retirement, I must admit that I very much miss the opportunity to attend such events as this and interact with the finest group of Government employees that I know. I relish the opportunity to talk about the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). It has been a major component of my life since 1956 when I worked as a student trainee at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in Utah. It concerns me just a bit that that occurred before many of you were born! My fascination with and love for Refuges began that summer and continued until this day with stops at Tishomingo, Wichita Mountains, Aransas (twice) and regional offices in Albuquerque, Minneapolis, Portland, and Atlanta, plus a brief stint in the Washington office.

Many of you know me from my almost 25 years in Atlanta. Some of you do not, and it is you folks that I wish to address first. Please be aware that those who do know me will tell you my presentations fall into one of two categories -- either slow and boring or fast and incomprehensible. Since I don't get to do this much anymore, I have made great effort to break that pattern and come up with a fresh approach for my allotted few minutes. So, you can expect either fast and boring or slow and incomprehensible. Seriously, I hope neither happens as the subject matter is very dear to me, and I want to do my best to convey a meaningful message on behalf of the Blue Goose Alliance.

The intent of the Alliance is to change what I would characterize as the Rodney Dangerfield Syndrome which has and does afflict the NWRS. The System does not get the respect it both deserves and needs. Unfortunately, we believe it will continue to lack respect and recognition and prominence in the Natural Resource Management arena until such time as it becomes one of the "Big Boys" by elevating its organizational stature to that of the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service. So the Blue Goose Alliance Mission is simply this: TO PROMOTE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM AS A SEPARATE AGENCY WITHIN THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR. We have also adopted a slogan suggested by Danny Redfearn, an alliance member from Arizona. It is: National Wildlife Refuges -- Where the Extraordinary is Every Day!

Now, it is important for me to state what our mission is not. It is not an attempt to dismantle, destroy, or in any way do harm to the Fish and Wildlife Service. I know that the agency status proposal has not been welcomed with open arms at the Departmental or Service level and that there is strong opposition to the idea, some of this based upon the premise that such a change would do harm to the Service. The Alliance has and will continue to attempt to dispel that notion. We are committed to maintaining open lines of communication with the Service. Our President, Noreen Clough, has sent personal letters to each Regional Director and the National Office offering to have Alliance representatives meet and discuss our plans with them. Meetings have occurred in Portland, Sacramento and Minneapolis and contact has been made with the Albuquerque and Anchorage Regional Offices. I would like to see the results of our efforts include both a strong National Wildlife Refuge Service and a strengthened U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service which would focus its conservation efforts unencumbered by the responsibility for managing the refuge system land base. I believe that is attainable. And, I am personally committed to ensuring that the Alliance carries out its efforts with the "no harm" premise a given. We are in the very preliminary stages of developing strategy and action plans and we would welcome suggestions. One issue that is often mentioned is returning Research to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Who are we? We are a small group of citizens -- presently less than three dozen -- who have for a variety of reasons agreed to give of our time and effort to elevate the stature of the NWRS. We have had two meetings in the past 18 months. The first near the birthplace of the NWRS at Pelican Island in the fall of 1999 and the second near Albuquerque this past December. At the latter meeting we decided to take action to incorporate as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and that effort is under way in New Mexico. We have members in 15 states (AK, AL, AR, CA, CO, FL, GA, NM, MD, MN, OR, TX, VA, WA, and WI). And, if I can get Sam Drake cornered, we will be able to add South Carolina to that list. While several of us are retired from the Fish and Wildlife Service, almost one third have no employment history with National Wildlife Refuges. I attended the Keystone Conference as did many of you and there we heard over and over again the word "passion" to describe the feeling that System employees, cooperators, and supporters have for our National Wildlife Refuges. I assure you that is a most appropriate word to describe the feelings of each of the Alliance members. We are a small but very dedicated and determined group.

So, I would describe the Blue Goose Alliance as alive and well but just getting started on its mission. Most, if not all of you should be in our data base for receiving Blue Goose Alliance Bulletins. This is presently our primary means of communicating the "goings on" of our group, and we send to about 750 addresses. Eight Bulletins have been distributed to date with such contents as our testimony on the Centennial legislation and follow up testimony on the proposal for agency status. If any of you are interested, I have some copies of Bulletin # 6 entitled Important Questions Regarding the National Wildlife Refuge Service and Bulletin #8 entitled Alliance Formally Organizing as a Nonprofit. You can access the Bulletins at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BGA-Bulletin>.

I find it most fitting that you are having your regional conference here in Florida where the NWRS had its humble beginning almost 100 years ago at Pelican Island. My hope is that the Blue Goose Alliance will accomplish its mission in time to be part of the centenary celebration on March 14, 2003. I can think of no more fitting gift to bestow upon the System than that of elevation to agency status as it enters its second century.

On a somewhat somber note, one of my personal NWRS heroes died a few weeks ago. Forrest Carpenter worked for many years in the North Central Region and was a mentor

to many of my generation. After retirement, Forrest worked tirelessly to help found the National Wildlife Refuge Association. He was its first President and gave so much of himself over many years as an advocate for the System. His lifelong support of the NWRS was nothing short of inspirational, and his passing has caused me to redouble my resolve to promote the elevation of the stature of the NWRS. Forrest was also a charter member of the Blue Goose Alliance and fully supported its mission.

Now that I have referenced the National Wildlife Refuge Association, I should convey to you that I am the Southeastern Representative for that support group. We are presently almost without staff in our Washington Office but efforts are nearing completion to hire a new President and CEO to replace David Tobin who resigned last October. Buff Bohlen is our new Board Chairman and Walt Stieglitz is Vice Chair. I foresee a reinvigoration of the Association under their leadership, and I am proud to be a part of that. We will continue to lend a hand where we can on such issues as the Okefenokee mining proposal (and now a modern day music amphitheater!), the Savannah Harbor deepening proposal, issues at White River, and others. Please contact me if you see a support role for the Association.

In closing, and in recognition that during my career I was frequently expected to come up with a joke or some other lighthearted commentary to make meetings more bearable, I have racked my brain for something appropriate. I hate to say it, but those of you with good memories are going to be terribly disappointed because I came up with nothing new. But, I did think of an oldie but goodie that seems to me to fit the occasion fairly well.

(Herein is told the story of the father with two sons, one an optimist, the other a pessimist. It ends with my hope that the Blue Goose Alliance finds the pony and successfully rides it to the accomplishment of its mission).

Thanks so much for the opportunity to appear here with you today.

-----Phil Morgan