

# Blue Goose Alliance Bulletin

#16 - January 26, 2002

## **Second Major Environmental Organization Endorses Blue Goose Alliance Mission!**

In recent correspondence, Frances Beinecke, Executive Director of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) endorsed the Blue Goose Alliance by saying: "NRDC supports your efforts and we agree that there would be great benefit for the Wildlife Refuge System if it were to be its own agency. We also feel that having its own agency would help to make the refuge system stronger and better funded, structured and recognized."

In July, the National Audubon Society reaffirmed its support in a letter to Noreen Clough, Blue Goose Alliance President, when Audubon President John Flicker stated he was very pleased that the Blue Goose Alliance had become "a full partner in national efforts to conserve and restore our beloved National Wildlife Refuge System." Mr. Flicker went on to state that Audubon shares our "commitment to bold efforts to conserve and protect our nation's wildlife refuges" and that Audubon looks forward to working with the Blue Goose Alliance "to reach our mutual goal of elevating the Refuge System to its full potential."

President Clough is now pursuing a common strategy with Audubon and NRDC to collectively pursue this goal.

## **"Part-Time" Director Revealed by Congressional Questions**

Recent Senate confirmation hearings on Capitol Hill for Steve Williams, nominated as Fish and Wildlife Service Director, have only reaffirmed the underlying reasons why Blue Goose Alliance members believe agency status is essential to the future well being of the Refuge System. Because of its many diverse responsibilities, the Fish and Wildlife Service Director simply cannot give the Refuge System the time and attention it sorely needs and so richly deserves. A somewhat superficial, but nonetheless interesting, analysis of the follow-up questions and answers from the recent confirmation hearings for Williams makes the point that things have not, cannot, and will not change in this regard. Mr. Williams was asked and responded to 37 questions. Four were related to the National Wildlife Refuge System in general, nine were specific to Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and two concerned refuges in Rhode Island. Twenty-two questions dealt with matters unrelated to the Refuge System, primarily endangered species issues.

The Refuge System has, in effect, only a part time Director! Even though all other major Federal land managing entities have diverse and far-reaching responsibilities, they are closely related to, and associated with, their basic land resource management responsibilities. The ancillary duties of the Director of FWS are more involved in regulatory, permitting, advisory and technical assistance issues. These issues affect federal and state agencies, Native tribes, private land owners and industrial developers throughout the nation. These issues are all consuming because of their restricting effects on people, which often bring major controversy and even require litigation for resolution.

It is little wonder that the Service Director, who retains sole line authority for the management of the National Wildlife Refuge System, is often hard pressed to

understand in depth or adequately represent the System's needs. This becomes a particularly onerous problem when it comes to advocacy for the System.

The point here is not to criticize the questions, the subject matter of the questions, or the responses provided by Mr. Williams. Rather, it is to demonstrate that, as with past Directors, the next Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service will, by absolute necessity, have as the majority of crucial issues he addresses, things not related to the Refuge System. It will continue to be true that only a small percentage of his time and attention will be focused on the National Wildlife Refuge System, and most of that, in the near future, specific to Arctic National Wildlife Refuge!

The Blue Goose Alliance firmly believes that the time has come for the National Wildlife Refuge System to have more than a part-time Director. By establishing the National Wildlife Refuge Service as a separate agency within the Department of the Interior, both the National Wildlife Refuges and the other important activities of the Fish and Wildlife Service will be better served.