

Blue Goose Alliance Bulletin

#38 - May 21, 2004

REP America Advocates Separate Refuge System

Recently, REP America (Republicans for Environmental Protection) adopted a policy which advocates the separation of the National Wildlife Refuge System from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and creation of a separate U.S. National Wildlife Refuge Service within the Department of Interior. REP America cited the following reasons for recommending this status change:

1. The multiple-values philosophy underlying sound principles of wildlife refuge management, including traditional consumptive use of wildlife, would best be served by removing the NWRS from the USFWS. This action would allow its leadership to focus on system integrity, continuity (including continuity of traditional uses), and improving efficiency and product delivery while fully implementing the 1997 NWRS Improvement Act as intended by Congress.
2. The NWRS has outgrown the USFWS and deserves equal status with sister land management agencies, the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management in the Department of Interior and U.S. Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture.
3. The NWRS would benefit financially and otherwise by not competing for limited funds and leadership support with other USFWS programs. Funding competition, in particular, can be significantly skewed against the NWRS when lawsuits against the USFWS result in court orders mandating that specific congressionally-authorized programs, such as enforcement of the Endangered Species Act, be given higher funding priorities.

The entire text of REP America's policy statement can be view on their website at

<http://www.rep.org/policy/refuges.html>

Alliance Joins Fight Against Development Affecting Minnesota Valley NWR

The Blue Goose Alliance has announced its opposition to construction and operation of a large scale amphitheater adjacent to the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge near Minneapolis.

Q-Prime, a New York-based entertainment corporation, is seeking approval from the Scott County, Minnesota, Board of Commissioners to construct and operate a 19,250 seat amphitheater immediately adjacent to the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge's Louisville Swamp Unit and the neighboring Minnesota Valley State Recreation Area. The Alliance opposes the amphitheater because it will generate degrading impacts harming the refuge, its visitors and visitor experiences, and depriving the local and migratory wildlife of vitally needed seclusion and shelter within these sensitive wildlife habitats.

The Alliance fully supports the coalition of local environmental groups opposing the development, and is making a contribution to the Legal Defense Fund recently established by Friends of Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Another important partner in this coalition effort is the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter of the National Audubon Society.

The regulatory litigation group at the law firm of Faegre & Benson, LLP, led by Brian O'Neill, has agreed to represent the coalition in the fight against Q Prime. Mr. O'Neill's previous cases include *Defenders of Wildlife v. Hodel*, related to the Exxon Valdez oil spill, which ultimately led to a guilty judgment of \$4.5 billion in damages.

A Complaint for Declarative and Injunctive Relief has been filed in District Court stating that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that is the basis for issuing permits fails to "address the potentially significant issues and alternatives raised in the [public scoping process]," and fails to "[respond] to the substantive comments received [during the process]" including the negative impacts from noise pollution, light pollution, air pollution, and increased foot traffic in the Refuge. The court was asked to preclude the county from issuing permits or approvals for construction prior to completion of an adequate EIS.

The Alliance is acutely aware of the need for constant vigilance and organized actions against those who would place perceived short-term economic gain above the substantial long-term public benefits associated with National Wildlife Refuges. In recent months the Alliance has moved to protect the integrity of the National Bison Range in Montana, Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge in Kansas, and the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. The Alliance ultimately seeks the legislative creation of a National Wildlife Refuge Service delegated by the Congress and dedicated solely to perpetual stewardship of America's world-class habitat system dedicated to fish, wildlife, and plants.

More information about the amphitheater issue can be found at the Friends of Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge website at:

<http://midwest.fws.gov/minnesotavalley/friends.html>

and the Minnesota Environmental Partnership website at:

http://www.mepartnership.org/mep_pressroom.asp?new_id=572