



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
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## Memorandum

To: Regional Chiefs, National Wildlife Refuge System

From: Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

*James W. Kuntz*

Subject: The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wilderness Act

In 2014, the United States will celebrate “50 Years of Wilderness” as it commemorates the golden anniversary of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and the Wilderness Act of 1964. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is responsible for 71 wilderness units in 26 states - overall, about 20 percent of the total wilderness acreage in the NWPS. Our agency’s wilderness areas are extremely diverse, encompassing swamps, deserts, islands and glaciers. They range from the 8 million acre wilderness of Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to the 6-acre wilderness of Pelican Island NWR.

As an agency, we have a rich history of habitat protection, including that of threatened and endangered species, through wilderness stewardship. Recent accomplishments include the 2008 significantly revised Wilderness Stewardship Policy, the Wilderness Character Monitoring Initiative, and the growing compilation of minimum requirement analyses.

During the historic anniversary year, we are strongly committed to educating Americans, particularly youth, about key wilderness benefits of clean air and water, critical wildlife habitat, and outstanding opportunities for recreation, spiritual renewal and regeneration. To accomplish this goal, the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) needs to play a key role in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary National Wilderness Planning Team (Wilderness50), a coalition of over 20 organizations including the four Federal wilderness management agencies, universities, and wilderness-related non-profit organizations.

On August 23, 2012, the Service joined the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, National Park Service, and national wilderness non-profit organizations in publically signing a Memorandum of Understanding formally committing to spotlighting and celebrating the Nation’s wilderness system in the months leading up to the Wilderness Act’s anniversary -September 3, 2014. To fulfill this commitment, I encourage full participation by all Service employees that work on wilderness refuges or oversee the wilderness program - within the context and limits of regular duties - in the planning and facilitation of national efforts through Wilderness50 and local awareness and educational events.

As I travel to our national wildlife refuges, I continue to be struck by the diversity of landscapes and the wonder of wilderness. Our legacy is woven in the beautiful tapestry of untrammelled landscapes which we are honored to steward on behalf of the American public. Let’s ensure that we will preserve wilderness for the generations of Americans to come.