

[From Spring 1994]

CNHA President Urges Support for Visitor Center

One-half of a new visitor center exists at the Eastern Shore of Virginia Refuge, and Refuge Manager, Sherm Stairs, has indicated that the second half of the center has been funded for this year. For those of you who have visited this beautiful center, you have seen the wonderful exhibits and sales area and realize the value of such a facility. When this center is completed, with new construction starting this year, it will be a valuable asset to the refuge's education and interpretive programs.

In talking recently with Refuge Manager, John Schroer, I found out that preplanning money for a new visitor center on the Chincoteague refuge came close to being a reality this current fiscal year. Congressman Bateman requested funding for this project; however, the funding was not approved in the final federal budget. As all of you are aware, the center at Chincoteague Refuge is very inadequate for the number of visitors it receives. In fact, John has told me that the center was built as a visitor contact station and was never meant to accommodate the nearly 100,000 visitors who use it each year. A new visitor center is called for in the recently approved Master Plan, and we, as individuals and as an association, can and should play a part in a new center becoming a reality.

The new facility will serve as the major educational and interpretive center for this magnificent refuge which has one of the highest visitations of all the nearly 500 refuges across the nation. The potential for educating hundreds of thousands of people concerning the need to protect and manage natural resources is just a visitor center away. It is estimated that a new center will attract over 300,000 of the approximately 1.5 million people who visit the refuge each year. With over a three-fold increase over current use and with a professional sales area in a new facility, our association would experience phenomenal growth and could do even more in meeting our mission.

How can we help? The last attempt in securing the preplanning money failed due to lack of sufficient support at the congressional level. You can play your part by writing to your representatives and senators and urging them to support a new visitor center at the Chincoteague Refuge. Since Congress will shortly be working on next year's budget, I encourage you to write immediately to:

The Honorable (your Senators)
U. S. Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

The Honorable (your Congress person)
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515

Bill Engelhart

