

[From Summer 2005]

CNWR Reaps Top Scores for Visitor Satisfaction

The Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, which offers a range of wildlife-dependent recreation, scored a solid "A" for visitor service satisfaction, according to a recent survey.

Commissioned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the survey shows that 98 percent of visitors to CNWR are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their experience.

Nationally, wildlife refuges scored a 4.48 on a five point satisfaction scale. Visitors were most satisfied with the service they received from employees and volunteers, giving that a 4.7 rating. Respondents specifically noted that employees and volunteers were courteous and answered questions about the refuge and its fish, wildlife, plants and habitats, and recreational opportunities.

CNWR offers excellent opportunities for wildlife observation and photography, hunting, fishing, interpretation, and environmental education throughout its beach, maritime forest, and salt and freshwater marsh habitats. A variety of annual events, such as the International Migratory Bird Celebration during the Mother's Day weekend, celebrate the array of wildlife found on the refuge.

National survey results were based on responses from 2,456 visitors to 47 National Wildlife Refuges in fall 2004, during the peak migration of millions of waterfowl and songbirds. The surveyed refuges represent a cross section of refuges, based on the number of visitors, staff, physical size, and geographic location. The survey was administered in the fall because that is when visitors flock to wildlife refuges.

National Wildlife Refuges are premier vacation and outdoor destinations. Each year, more than 40 million people visit refuges to fish, hunt, photograph or observe wildlife, and to participate in environmental education programs.

The National Wildlife Refuge System provides habitat for more than 700 species of birds, 220 kinds of mammals, and more than 200 types of fish. Each year, millions of migrating birds use refuges as stepping stones to rest and feed.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the nearly 100-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas.

It also operates 69 fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices, and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American Tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.