

[From Fall 2003]

Extensive Training for Refuge Law Enforcement

After spending approximately four years as a seasonal Refuge Law Enforcement Officer at Chincoteague NWR and Blackwater NWR, I finally attained permanent status. Upon receiving my permanent status as a Federal Law Enforcement Officer with the Fish and Wildlife Service in August, 2002, I began what was the start of many months of training - 25 weeks to be exact. The training was set up in three phases. I spent the first 14 weeks at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Glynco, Georgia; one week at Refuge Officer Basic School (ROBS) in West Virginia; and 10 weeks of Field Training in Minnesota and New Jersey.

FLETC center provides law enforcement training to the majority of federal law enforcement agencies. My class was made up of people from the FWS, Forest Service and the Tennessee Valley Authority. It was a rigorous and in-depth program covering everything from traffic stops and investigating crime scenes to fingerprinting. We also spent many hours in firearms, physical training, emergency driving, self-defense tactics and many other scenarios commonly experienced in the law enforcement field. As FLETC does not instruct strictly for resource agencies, I then had to begin the next 11 weeks focusing on resource issues with the Service.

I spent one week at the National Conservation Training Center in the ROBS course. This class consisted of training related to acts commonly violated in the resource field. Topics covered included, Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), Endangered Species Act, Lacey Act, Marine Mammal Act, Airborne Hunting Act and the Eagle Act. We also spent quite a few hours practicing our self-defense tactics.

The last phase of training was the Field Training Program. This is a fairly new program was designed for new graduates of the FLETC in preparation for solo law enforcement at their designated station. The program is set up to send "trainees" into two refuges for three phases of training. I spent four weeks at Minnesota Valley NWR, four weeks at Forsythe NWR, and two final weeks at Minnesota Valley NWR.

The first eight weeks were spent strictly training with a Field Training Officer (FTO). The idea is to allow the trainee an opportunity to enforce refuge regulations with the assistance of an FTO. Following each contact, we were then critiqued by the FTO and given a daily rating on our abilities.

The last two weeks were spent making contacts with refuge visitors and violators without the assistance of an FTO. Although the FTO is present, the last two weeks is the trainee's chance to put to use the many weeks of training we have received. Allowing that training is successful, we were then released to our refuge and given our permanent law enforcement commission.

Chincoteague refuge will now welcome two new permanent Refuge Officers, Frank Polyak (also a seasonal for several years) and Jim Fair. They will both soon begin their extensive training and we wish them both the best of luck.

Celeste Reagan
Refuge Law Enforcement Officer