

[From Fall 1993]

## **A Blast from the Past**

With a bridge from Chincoteague Island, new trails and facilities, increased refuge visitation was inevitable. Under the management of J. C. Appel, construction of the refuge Visitor Contact Station was started in 1973. In the same year, refuge visitation topped one million for the first time. When the Visitor Contact Station opened in 1974, it served as an orientation and information center for visitors, the main outlet for the concessionaire to sell tickets, and relieved office staff from the constant influx of visitors to refuge headquarters. By this time, evening movies in the summer were a regular attraction; the oil shed artist program was up and running; and Island Cruises was operating land and water tours. In 1978, interpretive walks were added to the list of summer activities. In 1979, after more than a decade of negotiation, the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service entered into a Memorandum of Understanding which clarified each agency's role in managing the Tom's Cove Hook portion of the refuge.

During this period of time, the horses were experiencing some problems. In 1974, fifty-three horses tested positive for equine infectious anemia (EIA) also called "swamp fever." The infected animals were quarantined in the northern portion of the refuge and were destroyed in order to prevent infection of the entire herd. The healthy animals were fenced in the southern part. The following spring, the foals were tested for the disease. Fortunately, only two tested positive. In 1977, thirty-eight mustangs were added to the herd to improve the stock and balance the numbers lost to EIA. In 1978, only nine of those mustangs had survived the winter.

By 1973, most of the current trails and facilities had already been developed. Improvements during this period included construction of the Wash Flats cross-dike, a new bridge (remember - the old one had been condemned even before it was brought here from New Jersey), and the lighthouse was repainted to the now-familiar red and white stripes. In 1977, NASA and the Fish and Wildlife Service, at that time called the Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife, entered into an agreement which granted the "Bureau" secondary management rights to conduct wildlife management and research programs on the 3,000 acre Wallops Island as long as the programs did not interfere with NASA mission activities. In 1975, Wallops Island National Wildlife Refuge was created through a land transfer between NASA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service. The 373 acre refuge is administered by the staff at Chincoteague NWR. In 1978, staff moved into "subheadquarters," a structure containing office space that is still in use. In 1983, Wildcat Marsh, at the northern tip of Chincoteague Island was purchased with Duck Stamp funds and included in the boundaries of the Chincoteague NNW. With increasing staff, it became necessary to create office space In one of the maintenance garages.



FWS Photo of the Assateague Lighthouse

In 1980, refuge manager J.C. Appel retired after eleven years at Chincoteague. Arriving from Jackson, Mississippi, Dennis Holland was to become the new refuge manager.

*Maggie O'Connell*  
*Outdoor Recreation Planner*