

[From Winter 1995-96]

Continuing Resolutions - and Federal Government Shutdowns

Over the past several months, the American people have become more aware of the political realities of our government and have become more knowledgeable about "continuing resolutions" and "federal government shutdowns." Continuing resolutions are actually a part of the every-year life of government workers, as most fiscal years begin with no federal budget being approved. Fortunately, the American public is not normally subjected to disagreements over the budget, and the government functions normally (or as near normal as possible) until the budget is finally approved. Not so in fiscal year 1996 which began on October 1 with the threat of a government shutdown. However, a continuing resolution was passed that kept the government afloat until midnight on November 13.

Then the unthinkable happened. The greatest government in the world was shut down and remained in that state until November 20, when common sense was restored - at least until December 15. (Note: At this writing, another possible shutdown is looming to "brighten" the holiday season.)

How did this shutdown impact the Chincoteague Refuge? As of noon on November 14, all of the refuge staff, with the exception of three with law enforcement authority, were sent home, presumably without pay. The refuge and seashore gates were closed to visitation and remained so through November 19. Visitation to the Chincoteague Refuge and the Town of Chincoteague was negatively impacted during the shutdown. The shutdown came four days prior to the beginning of Waterfowl Week, which has been celebrated on this station since the 1970's. The first weekend of this week normally accommodates over 6,200 visits. With the refuge gates being closed during this year's first weekend, approximately \$5,000 was missed in entrance fee gate revenues. An unknown amount was lost in sales by the CNHA. The Town of Chincoteague, which relies heavily on the visitors coming to the refuge for their economic well-being was severely impacted by the refuge closure, as the local motels experienced a cancellation rate in excess of 85%. In addition many of the visitors who came to the island left earlier than they had planned when they discovered the refuge was closed.

Wildlife on the refuge did not seem to be overly concerned about the condition of the federal budget or the lack of visitors for them to view.

With moist soil management units in ideal condition, waterfowl and other migratory birds visited the refuge by the thousands, even with the gates closed.

Even though another continuing resolution may be passed to prevent future shutdowns this fiscal year, these resolutions also have negative impacts. Spending is limited to essential items and cannot exceed a certain percentage of the previous year. Projects have been put on hold indefinitely, awaiting a final budget as the year slips away. Fortunately, the CNHA provided the refuge with a very generous donation in October, and those projects are

proceeding on schedule, despite the federal budget troubles. The refuge staff thanks you for that support.

*John D. Schroer,
Refuge Manager*