

# Remarks for Regional Director Melius Great Lakes Commission Meeting

~ Washington, D.C. ~

February 23, 2009

Final DRAFT

## I. Introduction

- Thank you Mr. Vice - Chair... And thank you Tim Eder....
- I appreciate the invitation to address the Commission as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Midwest Regional Director. We are the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats.
- In the Midwest and Northeast regions, the Great Lakes represent a significant allocation of agency resources. Collectively, we have 43 field stations working across the basin.

## II. FWS Priorities

- Sixty years ago, Rachel Carson wrote: *“Like the resource it seeks to protect, wildlife conservation must be dynamic, changing as conditions change, seeking always to become more effective.”*
- In that light, the new administration supports efforts to move us past playing defense against environmental problems and toward comprehensive restoration of the Great Lakes.
- With the incoming Administration, the Service provided several policy initiatives to the transition team. Allow me to highlight one or two of particular importance to the Great Lakes:

### Large-Scale System Restoration

- Our “marketplace” is now global. Our conservation targets — once as simple as protecting and managing parts and pieces — are now as complex as sustaining systems, functions and species populations at global scales.
- Our conservation responsibility vastly exceeds our individual organizational footprint across the landscape. Now, more than ever, we need to secure partnerships and share tools that take a basin wide approach.

- That means keeping a focus on the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration and its common set of priorities and score card to measure progress. And we remain committed to developing and using the right tools to get the job done.
- For example, the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act provides states, tribes, and private interests the potential to address the basin's most pressing conservation challenges, including those prioritized by the Collaboration, such as the wetlands and invasives objectives.

### **Energy**

- Energy issues, especially those that focus on renewable sources, will consume much of our time and effort in the Great Lakes and will require careful consideration, as decisions made today will alter the landscape for decades.
- Speaking of renewable energy, let me thank the Commission for administering the Great Lakes Wind Collaborative. This unprecedented regional effort brings together stakeholders with diverse interests and offers the opportunity to develop renewable wind power in environmentally sustainable ways. This type of “outside the box thinking” sets an example for other energy work that could benefit from shared objectives and dialogue.

### **Education: Connecting People with Nature**

- The values and experiences of both nations' publics will have much to say about the Great Lakes in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Will outdoor experiences play a part?
- Author Richard Louv suggests not, unless we develop an effective remedy for the phenomenon he terms “nature deficit disorder.” Encouraging outdoor experiences – a connection with the natural world – remains key to long term success in the Great Lakes.
- As a result, we are engaging with local communities, having schools, for example, conducting classes at our stations.
- In fact, tomorrow, the Jordan River National Fish Hatchery in Michigan will host elementary classes for Mancelona Public Schools. Students will have structured and unstructured time integrating curriculum with outdoor experience. How could we expand this effort across all of our jurisdictions and interests?

## **III. Climate Change**

- Climate change provides the urgency to rethink how we approach our missions. And we have to lead the change rather than follow it.
- Taken together, these initiatives show the Service re-calibrating for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We have already started – Having just arrived from my previous post in

Alaska, the effects and implications of climate change represent the here and now, as evidenced by the listing of polar bear.

- Further, the Service has drafted a climate change strategic plan and will soon open a dialogue with our partners, recognizing that everyone has a meaningful part to play in our country's response.
- For the Great Lakes, we anticipate shifting species ranges, changes in composition of plant communities, fluctuations in water levels, and decreased ice. We expect disconnects among animals, plant communities, and predators and prey, as different species shift ranges, and at different rates.
- Our collective challenge will be to translate climate projections into transparent predictions of how wildlife populations and habitats will change in response. The same holds true for standardized responses for contaminants, invasive species, and water management.

#### **IV. Partnership is key to success**

- Shared issues require shared leadership and effort. We are fortunate to have that in the Great Lakes. That's our strength.
- We must all look at ourselves - whether state, tribal, federal, industry or NGOs - as interdependent organizations.
- We should also look to build on and strengthen our partnerships with the major metropolitan areas throughout the Great Lakes, taking Chicago Wilderness and the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge as our example.
- What we find in our cities - business, universities, government, conservation organizations, media - shapes public opinion and conservation agendas. We hope to work with the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Cities Initiative to identify further opportunities for collaborative work.
- Coordination of mutual interests is no longer enough. We need to build and share capacities for measurable resource outcomes.
- Regional identities, like the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, and statutes, such as the Legacy Act and the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act, will help us take a wide angle view of the Great Lakes.

## V. Closing

- In closing, our challenges are significant, but we have the advantage of state and tribal leadership, organizations like the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, NGOs, such as DU and TNC, and the list goes on and on.
- We count each and every organization as a contributor to a larger cause – the restoration and continued health of the Great Lakes.
- Thank you Mr. Vice-Chairman, and thank you all. I would be happy to answer any questions.