

Outreach Narrative  
Canaan Valley NWR  
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**Statement by Ronald E. Lambertson  
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The Northeast Regional Office of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service learned this week that an internal memorandum critical of biological ascertainment studies and management plans for the proposed Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge in West Virginia, has been made public.

This staff memorandum airs a professional disagreement among involved Service staff managers. Such disagreements are not uncommon—especially where biological issues are contrasted with actual day-to-day management of a national wildlife refuge—and they contribute positively to the final decision on what a refuge's mission will be, the priority resources and how they will be managed.

The end result of this internal dialogue is a solid refuge plan that takes into account the natural resource issues, and the internal concerns of Service professionals as well as those concerns of local residents, special interest groups, and other state and federal partners in the process.

While the Service is aware of the details of this disclosure—who did it, why, and how—it has three immediate concerns:

(1) The recommendations contained in the memorandum—on the desirability of the South end of the valley and the compatibility of certain recreational activities within the refuge mission—are the author's personal opinion and have been addressed in significant detail in the Service's compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which includes its comprehensive preparation of the refuge's Environmental Impact Statement; and in preparation of the Station Management Plan, which ultimately directs management activities inside the Refuge boundary.

(2) The policy of the Service is to invite its employees and, particularly, its managers into free, open, and frank discussion of management tasks in order to address every level of concern within the decision-making process. Disclosures of this kind tend to have a chilling effect on that process;

(3) The caustic tone of the memo and its unfortunate personal attack on the professional credibility of two career biologists by another Service

employee were most unfortunate and unwarranted, and its allegations unfounded;

It is regrettable that the disclosure of this memo—without a clear understanding of the context in which these dialogues take place—gives the erroneous appearance of an administrative breakdown in the process of bringing the refuge establishment process to the point where it presently stands.

This is simply not the case.

Establishment of the Canaan Valley NWR has been 20 years in the process. Every effort has been made to address both the administrative concerns of the Service with respect to wildlife values within a given location, and the concerns of valley residents over the potential impacts the refuge might have on traditional recreational activities.

Notwithstanding the contentions contained in the disclosed communication, nothing has changed in our management plan, nor are any changes planned as a result of it. The issues raised had previously been discussed and given adequate consideration. Thus, the directed course of the Service is consistent with the NEPA process and with that detailed in public meetings and official documents, including the Station Management Plan.

This memorandum was unsolicited and is too contentious to be worthy of any meaningful consideration.

With respect to the specific recommendations in the memo:

The two principle disagreements involve:

- 1) the south end of the valley, its inclusion and importance, and
- 2) the discussion of public uses, compatibility, public expectations.

**Recommendations 1-3.** These are closely related and basically involve the question of the southern end of the valley being included in the refuge boundary. We have gone on record many times over the past 3+ years explaining that the original EIS boundary was based on biological importance of habitat, and any adjustments to that boundary now have to be based on changes to habitat (e.g., we have removed 4000+ developed acres because these lands no longer have the habitat values for which they were originally included).

We have recognized for some time that the south end would represent a

management challenge, however the ecological importance/habitat values/watershed and wetlands protection functions originally recognized in the EIS have been reaffirmed by recent studies and field reconnaissance. Because of development in the southern portion of the valley the Service has already excluded lands that would not contribute to the original purposes of protection.

The Service priorities for protection/acquisition begin with the major corporate landownerships in the central and north valley that include the major wetland complexes and associated upland habitats. The Service will continue to work to secure the longterm protection of these important habitats/ properties. If those parcels are not available, or adequate funding to buy them is not available, the Service will next consider the acquisition of parcels in the south end that include important wetlands and buffer strips, and endangered species habitats. Other lands in the south end are considered the next lower priority.

As always, we will seek to acquire higher priority lands first.

**Item 4.** The Elkins-Kelly property is one of the larger undeveloped tracts in the south end. It provides important wildlife habitat values and serves an important watershed/ water quality function. While part of this property may not be top priority, certain portions support endangered species and are high priority.

**Items 5,6.** Refuge management in the south end will depend on actual land acquired. the monitoring of the water quality/endangered species issues on privately held lands will continue to be a responsibility of our Ecological Services office in Elkins.

5-1) Regardless of whether the Service acquires land in the south end, we will continue to cooperate with local, county, state, and other federal agencies to work out solutions which protect the watershed of Blackwater River.

6) The Service, both singularly and as part of the Canaan Valley Task Force, will continue to seek acceptable and environmentally sound approaches to any project or proposal that will affect the water quality or wetland functions in the south end. The long term maintenance of water quality in this area will be fully dependent on the federal/state/local cooperation exhibited in the Task Force. Although the Service may not be able to acquire all of the habitat that it feels is critical in the south end, the wetlands, buffers, and endangered species habitat will remain a priority as willing sellers appear.

**Items 7,8.** We acknowledge the need to phase other people into the refuge

establishment/planning process. A small Service team will be established as the project progresses.

The Division of Realty's ascertainment's role is always temporary. The ascertainment phase is coming to an end with completion of the Station Management Plan and the Land Protection Plan. Upon completion of the ascertainment phase, the new Service team be instituted and will consist of various refuge and realty functions.

As Service responsibilities change for the new emerging refuge it is expected that the support roles of Service personnel will change, and a permanent refuge manager will become the spokesperson for the refuge issues in the valley.

Item 9. It is expected that when a refuge manager is selected the responsibility of addressing refuge-related issues and concerns will no longer need to involve non-refuge personnel. We expect that our involvement with the Canaan Valley Task Force, with its much broader purpose and constituency, will continue as long as the local community sees a need for it, and there is an opportunity for the Service to provide assistance to it.

Item 10. We hope to assign a refuge manager shortly. It is expected that this individual will work with local communities (and landowners) during the refuge establishment/acquisition phase. We believe this is critical.

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