

Interior. Mr. Gottschalk, I am sure you can give us answers to such questions as may have been stimulated by the presentations so far.

STATEMENT OF JOHN S. GOTTSCHALK, DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR; ACCOMPANIED BY MR. DAVID FINNEGAN, OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. GOTTSCHALK. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, the Department of the Interior is vitally interested in the Wilderness Act and its implementation.

Our preliminary reviews indicate that almost 47 million acres of the national wildlife refuge and national park systems qualify for study under the act. The areas comprising this vast acreage span the Nation, and will provide a significant contribution to the national wilderness preservation system. Because of this, I am pleased to be here this morning to speak in support of the first wilderness proposals from our Department.

Formal wilderness designation is a new concept in administration of the national wildlife refuge system, and I think it appropriate that I review the background of the refuge wilderness study program and the policies and interpretations that have been used as guidelines with respect to the administration of the proposed refuge wilderness areas.

The national wildlife refuge system includes all areas administered by the Secretary of the Interior as wildlife refuges, areas for the protection and conservation of fish and wildlife that are threatened with extinction, wildlife ranges, game ranges, wildlife management areas, and waterfowl production areas. The system consists of 317 units with a total of nearly 29 million acres of widely diverse wildlife environments. Refuge areas have been established in 46 States. About two-thirds of the land area of the system is in Alaska.

Most refuges, except for the game ranges of the West and in Alaska, are relatively small in size. However, these many small units offer unique values and a new challenge to wilderness classification. The values of such refuges as wilderness must be determined by careful analysis of the ecological and biological factors which make them significant for preservation, rather than their comparative size.

During the first 3-year study period under the Wilderness Act, the wilderness potential of 30 national wildlife refuges was studied. Fourteen of these first 30 proposals have been submitted to the Congress. The remaining 16 proposals are under review.

National wildlife refuges are the principal Federal lands whose primary purpose is the conservation and management of wildlife environments. Thus, any wilderness areas designated by Congress within units of the national wildlife refuge system will be established within boundaries of areas originally and primarily set aside for wildlife conservation purposes. These areas have been managed as refuges and many were managed for other purposes before they became refuges.

The Wilderness Act is superimposed upon the basic congressional mandates which govern the administration of refuge areas. The purposes of the Wilderness Act are "declared to be within and supplemental to the purposes for which national forests and units of the