

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
STATEMENT ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES ISSUED

The Environmental Impact Statement (here in known as EIS) on National Wildlife Refuges issued November 12, was prepared as a result of a lawsuit brought in 1974 by private conservation groups concerned with how 367 individual refuges were being funded and managed. A draft statement was issued in November 1975. Following that, eight public hearings and over 200 written comments from Federal, State, and local agencies, plus 59 conservation groups, five universities, and numerous private citizens prompted changes in the final version.

The changes reflect concerns expressed over major issues such as haying and grazing, refuge hunting and trapping, use of chemicals, changes in traditional waterfowl distribution patterns, and waterfowl depredation upon agricultural crops.

This EIS is a "programmatic" statement as opposed to a "site-specific" statement. It is an environmental document which recognizes the major components of refuge operation, identifies the principal biological, physical and social impacts associated with routine activities on refuges, such as farming, waterfowl population control, and water management, and provides sufficiently broad impact analysis to allow the decisionmaker to choose the least environmentally damaging course of action.

The EIS is designed to cover a 10-year span of normal operations. It will be updated throughout that period as additional scientific data are collected. It should facilitate the preparation of more site-specific assessments that future proposed actions might require under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Copies of the final environmental impact statement on the operation of the National Wildlife Refuge System may be obtained by writing to: Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Refuges, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

UPDATE ON: STEEL SHOT - A RESPONSE TO LEAD POISONING

The Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service news release of January 4, 1977 discusses further the lead shot poisoning which kills annually an estimated 2 million waterfowl in the United States. While feeding in the wetlands, where waterfowl hunting is permitted, birds swallow lead pellets which are subsequently ground down in their gizzards. The resultant lead salts pass into the blood stream, causing sickness and very often death in these birds.

Extensive research has been carried out on the lead poisoning of waterfowl. The January 1976 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Final Environmental Statement reviewed 25 years of investigators on this problem. It was found that many wetlands contain two or more lead pellets per square foot in the prime feeding areas for waterfowl. Having examined more than 50,000 gizzards throughout the United States, it was found that in some areas 25-50 percent of the ducks had lead pellets.

To alleviate this problem, the U.S. government banned the use of lead shot. As reported in Bird Observer of Eastern Massachusetts, Vol. 4 no. 5, steel shot will be required in 12, 16, 20, and 28 gauges and 410 shot guns in portions of nine Atlantic seaboard states for the 1977 hunting season. However, those regulations have since been temporarily rescinded to require steel shot in only 12 gauge or larger shot guns, because of a lack of supply in the smaller gauges.

During the 1977-1978 hunting season the requirement to use steel shot for waterfowl hunting will be further expanded within the Atlantic Flyway, and will be broadened to include the Mississippi Flyway as well. The Atlantic Flyway expansion will include an area which will affect 50 percent of the duck harvest within that flyway. Next hunting season will be the first time steel shot will be required anywhere in the Mississippi Flyway's 11 states. About 35 percent of its harvest will be affected by the changes.

The proposed zones, where steel shot may be required in the U.S., can be found in the Federal Register, December 23, 1976. The area in Massachusetts affected by the regulations is delineated by highways. It is described as that part of the state lying east of U.S. Rte. 1 beginning at the New Hampshire-Massachusetts border, proceeding southward to the junction with Rte. 3, then southeastward along Rte. 3 to U.S. Rte. 6. The line runs west on Rte. 6 to include all areas to the south of this highway to the Rhode Island state line.