



Mark Carwardine's **AT A GLANCE...**

20

US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

WHAT IS THE US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE?

It is the primary conservation agency in the US, responsible for the management of fish, wildlife and natural habitats. It began life in 1871 as the United States Commission on Fish and Fisheries, created by Congress to halt declining fish stocks, and became the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1940.

IS IT A GOVERNMENT AGENCY?

Yes, it is a bureau within the US Department of the Interior. This is the department responsible for protecting and managing the nation's natural resources and cultural heritage. As well as the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Department of the Interior oversees the National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, US Geological Survey, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and other agencies.

WHAT ARE ITS RESPONSIBILITIES?

Officially, the USFWS mission is to "work with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people." Its wide-ranging responsibilities include enforcing federal wildlife laws, protecting endangered species, managing habitats for migratory birds, restoring nationally significant fisheries, conserving and restoring wildlife habitats and helping foreign governments with their international conservation efforts.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

It has a central administrative office, eight regional offices and nearly 700 field offices throughout the US, with a workforce of about 9,000 people. Its work includes administering the Endangered Species Act 1973, which has been tremendously successful in saving the California condor, bald eagle and many other species from extinction. It also manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, which consists of 563 refuges and other protected areas covering 607,000km². And it works on habitat restoration programmes to provide protection on non-federal lands.

DOES IT REGULATE HUNTING?

According to the Department of the Interior, "improving access to national wildlife refuges supports the great American traditions of hunting and fishing that together generate billions of dollars for conservation and billions more for our nation's economy." The USFWS view is that any habitat supporting healthy wildlife populations produces "harvestable surpluses" and, consequently, regulated hunting, trapping and fishing is allowed in many National Wildlife Refuges.

IS THIS CONTROVERSIAL?

Yes. While the federal government argues that the conservation goal should be biodiversity, some state governments are more



The USFWS helped save the California condor from going extinct.

interested in ensuring maximum populations for hunting. Earlier this year, President Donald Trump signed a Senate-approved bill repealing Obama-era hunting restrictions in Alaska's wildlife refuges. Alaskan law-makers wanted to take back powers to control predators such as bears and wolves to boost populations of moose, elk and caribou. As a result, hunters can now shoot from helicopters, live trap and target mothers with young, among a number of extreme methods.

ANYTHING ELSE?

There are fears that this is just the beginning. The Trump administration has made clear its view that the US Endangered Species Act is a barrier to economic progress, especially with regard to oil and gas exploration and mineral development. Indeed, it plans to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge – widely considered the crown jewel in the National Wildlife Refuge System – to oil and gas drilling, despite the region's critical conservation importance. Meanwhile, Trump's detailed 2018 budget proposal contains a 12 per cent funding cut for the Department of the Interior (equivalent to roughly US\$1.6bn a year) which, inevitably, will mean drastic cuts for the USFWS. 📧

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MARK CARWARDINE is a frustrated and frank conservationist.

Every month he demystifies some of the most important issues affecting the world's wildlife and assesses the organisations that protect it.

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