

From: **Director, FWS** <fws_director@fws.gov>

Date: Thu, Jan 19, 2017 at 1:27 PM

Subject: Dan's Final Message

To:

Okay, this is my final all-employee message. I'll borrow from Mark Twain, and apologize that it's not shorter, but I just didn't have the time.

My earliest memories of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service date back to the early 1960's. My dad began his Service career, in 1953, and he worked in the Southeast region until 1971. I was looking at my birth certificate recently (1956) and it had his occupation as "Land Appraiser." Our summer vacations were spent following him to places like Blackbeard Island, Big Pine Key, Sanibel Island, Okefenokee, Piedmont, Lake Mattamuskeet, and Chattahoochie Forest, where he worked on land acquisitions. I fished and crabbed with Tommy Woods, the first manager at J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, and listened to riveting stories by Jack Watson, the iconic and first manager at National Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge. I have known every Director since John Gottschalk (1964-1970). As a young boy, I thought you could not say "Corps of Engineers" without the predicate "God damn." I literally grew up in and around this organization. I love it and the people who do its work.

My 22 years with you has been a joy, and my nearly six years as your Director has been the privilege and honor of a lifetime. Thank you!

All good things do end, and I knew in accepting the Director job that I was working on the clock of the Obama Administration. So, at the end of the day, today, I will walk out the door for the final time as an employee. Not sad. Proud!

I'll leave you with a few reflections, and aspirations.

First, a few necessary words of thanks:

- Former Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, for convincing President Obama to nominate me as Director. He had more confidence in me than I had in myself.
- All who have served as my deputy -- Paul Schmidt, Jim Kurth (twice!), Bill Knapp, Rowan Gould, Greg Siekaniec, and Steve Guertin -- bless you!
- To everyone who ever sent me a note of appreciation, especially those who have had the courage to share concern and constructive criticism. People like Stuart Jacks, Paul Tritaik, Nancy Zapotocki, Charlie Wooley, Mike Bryant, Matt Hogan, Robyn Thorson, and many others.
- To everyone who ever told me that I was behaving badly, or that my latest great idea was perhaps not ready for prime time -- Betsy, Jim, Sabrina, Anna, Charisa, Teresa, Jerome, and many others -- you made me better.
- Jessie Cheek, you have been a blessing. You swore me into this outfit, in 1995, and you're guiding me through retirement.

Perspectives on legacy -- distinct from accomplishments -- which is the product of sustained leadership:

- Our organization has its head up, sees the big picture, and is working at ecologically meaningful scales. Think sage grouse, western cutthroat, monarch butterfly, river herring, Everglades headwaters, Flint Hills, and on and on. The legacy is not in the specific applications, but in the disciplined and broad-framed thinking that supports them.
- A workforce and leadership committed to diversity and inclusion, even if we have yet to figure out how to most effectively achieve it.
- A modern policy framework, designed to drive 21st century conservation.
- An exceptional cadre of leaders, Directorate and Deputies, who know one another, as colleagues and as people. Did you know that Gary Frazer's favorite song is Bruce Springsteen's 2010 remastered version of Racing the Street? Or that Benjamin Tuggle once long-jumped 27 feet and qualified for the Olympics? Or that Noreen Walsh hunts pronghorn antelope? They support one another, unfailingly, including especially the ability to offer and receive constructive criticism.

- An emerging determination to set and adhere to clear priorities -- including what's important and especially, what is less important -- and a recognition that this is the obligation of leadership.
- A commitment to continual improvement and building an organization and a professional culture that is fit for the future.

Achievements:

- We worked with federal and state partners to drive conservation into nearly 200 million acres of the "sagebrush sea," securing a future for sage grouse and hundreds of other sage-dependent species.
- At our recommendation, President Obama sent to Congress the first wilderness recommendation since President Nixon, and the largest wilderness recommendation ever -- 12.8 million acres in the Arctic NWR.
- Along with our friends and colleagues at NOAA, we are stewards of the largest permanently protected area on the planet -- the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (MNM).
- And with expansion of "Big Papa" and the Pacific Remote Islands MNM, and establishment of the NE Atlantic Canyons and Seamounts MNM, the National Wildlife Refuge System is now the world's largest system of protected lands and waters -- over 850 million acres (no disrespect at all, but that's more than 5 times more than was added to the refuge system in its first 110 years).
- We delisted more species, due to recovery, than all previous administrations combined, including the first fish ever delisted due to recovery -- the Oregon Chub.
- We reconnected thousands of miles of aquatic habitat in places like the Elwha and Penobscot Rivers.
- We stood tall in fighting an epidemic of wildlife trafficking, reaffirming our position as world conservation leaders.
- We banned domestic sales of ivory, showing the world that we value living wild elephants more than we value trinkets.
- We led the world at the most successful and consequential CITES COP, ever.
- We rededicated ourselves to conservation of the prairie potholes, committing 70% of the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to the task and protecting nearly one million acres, with more to come.
- We began a new and exciting urban conservation focus, helping to ignite a connected conservation constituency for the future.
- We kept the Great Lakes free from the scourge of Asian carp.
- We joined a valiant response to the Gulf oil spill and are playing a lead role in restoration efforts.
- We prevented construction of a road through the heart of the Izembek NWR wilderness.
- We survived an armed, 41-day occupation of the Malheur NWR.

Best day: It's impossible to pick one, so here are a few --

- Sunrise at Pelican Island, March 13, 2003, with Sam Hamilton, Alan Palisoul, Jon Andrew, Lou Hinds, and Paul Tritaik.
- Sitting in a boat, in the flooded timber of Cache River NWR, with now-retired refuge manager Dennis Widner -- Dennis, I believe it was an Ivory-billed woodpecker we saw.
- Holding a hummingbird in the palm of my hand.
- Capturing a polar on the Chukchi Sea ice.
- Hiking the slopes along the Sheenjek Valley in the Arctic Refuge.
- Watching literally millions of seabirds swirling about the cliffs at Cape Pearce, in Togiak NWR.
- Hearing wolves from the Pinnacle Peak Pack howl in reply to Mike Jimenez at National Elk NWR.
- Crushing contraband ivory in Times Square.
- Releasing Monarch butterflies with children at Minnesota Valley and John Heinz NWRs.
- Slipping into the water, with Susan White, at Palmyra Atoll NWR, alongside a pod of melon headed whales.
- The day the Malheur NWR occupation ended.
- When a young Megan Reed sat next to me, behind the "United States of America" placard, at the CITES 17th Conference of the Parties, and calmly and articulately presented a resolution to 3500 delegates from 180 nations.
- Any day when I got a thank you note from someone in the field.

Worst day: Easy. There were three of them. When it was my duty to call the family of Service employees who died in the line-of-duty.

Biggest disappointment: We have made much progress in building a culture of diversity and inclusion within the Service and our broader profession. I'm proud of that, but disappointed that we didn't achieve more on my watch.

Challenges ahead:

- Conservation is increasingly irrelevant in America. We need to lead a renaissance in relevancy. This will require different thinking and much better story telling. Thanks to Betsy Hildebrandt and our leaders in External Affairs, we have a communications strategy that's fit for this challenge.
- We must continue building upon our legacy of competency. It is key to public and partner confidence in our decisions: support NCTC; encourage professional development among employees; invest in growing leaders; engage in professional societies.
- Make diversity and inclusion a personal and professional passion, individually and collectively. There is no higher organizational priority. You will be a better employee and leader. The Service will be more effective. Conservation will be more relevant.
- Be courageous and encourage courage. We need to continue building a culture where employees can safely speak out when they see things that are wrong, but fear of adversity cannot excuse silence. Courage is not the absence of fear, but overcoming it. If you see or hear of something wrong, it is your obligation to do something about it. Be courageous and share your courage with others.

You are a part of an incredible organization. Relish every day; even the frustrating ones. I'm thankful for the opportunity to work with you. Michael Gerson wrote that, "The very best thing about your life is a short stage in someone else's story." Thanks for being a part of my story. You've made it so much better!

And I'll close by repeating the words I heard former-Director Lynn Greenwalt speak, in 1998, at the first-ever Refuge System vision conference: "If I were young again, I would join you!"

Very best!! And I hope our paths continue crossing!!!

Dan.