
*Virginia
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In the news...

Norton Charts a Different Course for the Interior Department

Adapted from article by Timothy Egan published in the New York Times, August 19, 2001

Few things reveal what a change in power means so much as when someone new takes over at Interior. The secretary is the emperor of the outdoors, in charge of 436 million acres of public land, as well as the nation's leading water manager, controlling access to 31 million people. And thrown in as a sort of historical afterthought is the domain of American Indian trust lands.

Ms. Norton, a rangy native Westerner with a perpetual cheery smile, still has trouble believing that one in five acres in the United States are under her control. She has spent much of her professional life challenging the mission of some managers at Interior. Now, at age 47, she rules them all.

"I just have to keep pinching myself," Ms. Norton said in an interview. "I still can't believe I'm actually doing this."

Her critics say there has been a hostile takeover at the Interior Department by industries that want to exploit public lands. They point to a host of oil, gas and coal industry lobbyists who have been given influential posts at the department. And they say that aside from Frances P. Mainella, who has been chosen to head the national

parks, no one with environmental credentials has been named to a top job at Interior.

"The theme under Gale Norton is deference to industry and local political forces," said Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, which represents about 10,000 state and federal employees who work on public lands. "For the average field biologist, merely doing your job could soon become a profile in courage."

Ms. Norton waves off such complaints. She says she is merely hiring people whom the previous administration kept out of power.

"Today, instead of unilateral actions, we should go for consensus actions," Ms. Norton said.

But on the land, where a diversion of water can mean either the death of a species or the bankruptcy of a family rancher, consensus has been elusive.

In recent speeches, Ms. Norton has barely touched the full range of concerns in her department. She has been promoting energy development in tandem with President Bush while playing down concerns about which plants or animals to protect under the Endangered Species Act.

She was unaware of a court order in New Mexico, for example, requiring her to decide

within three weeks the fate of the rare Sacramento checkerspot butterfly.

Ms. Norton says she has yet to build her legacy because she has been waiting to put her top political appointees in place. Now that she has named J. Steven Griles, a former lobbyist for mining and chemical interests, as the No. 2 person at Interior, Camden Toohey, a lobbyist for Arctic oil drilling, as her top official in charge of Alaska, and Ms. Kimball, a lobbyist for Western business issues, as her chief aide in the West, Ms. Norton is ready to go.

"The most important question is what are we going to do now," Ms. Norton told the Western Governors Association meeting here. "I want history to record that under our watch we combined thought with action."

Ms. Norton says many of the Clinton-era decisions were made in haste without consulting the people who stand to lose access. Under her watch, people who depend on public land for recreation or profit and stand to lose by a federal decision will be consulted, she said.

But when asked if there is a single proposal by the energy or recreation interests to use public lands that she opposes, Ms. Norton said nothing came to mind. "I can think of a lot of things that I would oppose, but nothing specific right now," she said.

Navy Claims Environmental Laws Are Threat To National Security. Military to Seek Legislative Exemptions, Documents Show

From press release from PEER and Endangered Species Coalition on August 21, 2001

Citing growing restrictions on its operations, weapons development and training, the U.S. Navy will soon seek Congressional exemption from compliance with several environmental laws, according to agency documents released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER).

"The Navy's environmental philosophy is 'damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead,'" commented PEER General Counsel Dan

Meyer, a former Navy officer. "The Navy's senior command does not appreciate that defense of the nation does not demand despoliation of our natural resources."

In recent briefings and position papers, Navy officials contend "the cumulative impact of compliance [with applicable environmental laws] can have severe to extreme consequences on operational readiness."

Present and future limitations on firing live explosives, night training, operations in marine sanctuaries and emerging weapon systems, such as its new LFA (Low Frequency Active) sonar present potential obstacles to the Navy's mission. The Navy decries actions to protect threatened and endangered species by federal wildlife protection agencies such as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service because they take a "precautionary approach" toward protecting sea life, arguing that its operations should not be hampered by "lack of quality data" and "limited scientific understanding" of the vulnerability of marine mammals, sea turtles and other aquatic life.

Despite recommendations that Navy contractors "consider, wherever practical, using closed environments (e.g. quarries, catch-ponds) for the testing of ordnance and other live-fire testing" the Navy resists adopting any possible changes in its own operations to avoid environmental impacts. Instead the documents outline a series of statutory exemptions that the Navy intends to seek from the Endangered Species Act.

"We cannot simply stand by while the military or anyone else attempts to cut and shred the fabric of our nation's environmental laws, especially one that was so painstakingly crafted by past generations," said Brock Evans, a former marine and executive director of the Endangered Species Coalition.

For more information contact: Jessica Vallette Revere, PEER 202-265-7337 Brock Evans, Endangered Species Coalition, 202-772-3231 Copies of the Navy documents referenced are available on request.

Surprise at U.P.S.: Alligator-in-the-Box

Adapted from an article published August 4, 2001 by Nichole M. Christian

You've heard about the alligators supposedly in the New York sewers, and the one that was in Central Park--but the one in the next-day-delivery package?! On Thursday, workers at a special United Parcel Service center in Brooklyn opened a cardboard box, sent from Atlanta and bound for a residential address in Brooklyn, and found a five-foot alligator. It was thrashing around in the box, even though its snout and legs were tied up with duct tape.

"Whoever shipped this was lying to us about the contents," said Norman Black, a spokesman for U.P.S. "We would have never accepted a package with a live animal in it, and certainly not an alligator."

Mr. Black said the workers were tipped off because nature had intervened. "We believe the animal had to go to the bathroom," he said; the box had begun to leak, alarming the driver. Thinking the contents might be hazardous, the driver rushed the box to the emergency U.P.S. center in Brooklyn. The city's Center for Animal Care and Control has temporarily placed it in an East New York animal shelter, while yesterday, investigators for U.P.S. pinned down the identities of the person who shipped the alligator and the intended recipient. Mr. Black said the names would not be released until officials had a chance to speak with the people, and to determine whether the shipper had violated any laws on transporting live animals.

While the trip may have been traumatic for the alligator, by yesterday it was living like a fat cat. It was basking in the attention from the shelter's staff; the workers nicknamed him Ally and turned an area formerly used as a dog run into a temporary home. "We don't customarily get alligators; we're mostly dog and cat people," said Doris Meyer, a spokeswoman for the Center for Animal Care and Control. "But from everything we can gather, he seems to be a little happier."

CARA passes House Resources Committee with Strong Bipartisan Support

Adapted from a press release from the House Resources Committee, August 8, 2001

The House Resources Committee passed H.R. 701, the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA), by a vote of 29-12. The bill establishes the Conservation and Reinvestment Act Fund, which is to be used for federal and state conservation, wildlife and recreation projects.

The fund will provide \$900 million for land acquisition for conservation and recreation projects. States will receive half of the money -- \$450 million. The bill caps federal expenditures for land acquisition at \$450 million and mandates that each acquisition be a federal budget line item, a move that gives members of Congress ample opportunity to object to any land purchase in their district. These monies are administered through the existing Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

This version of CARA gives states more flexibility and control of how public lands are acquired and then used. State and local officials will decide whether funds are used for improving wetlands, enhancing recreational areas, or building city parks and playgrounds.

In addition, CARA fully funds the Payment In-Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program and the Refuge Revenue Sharing (RRS) program. H.R. 701 also prohibits the federal government from using adverse condemnation to acquire new lands. CARA funds will not be used to acquire property unless the owner willingly agrees to sell or if the acquisition receives express Congressional approval.

Visit the websites of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (<http://www.iafwa.org>) or Teaming with Wildlife (<http://www.teaming.com>) to find out more about this bill and other legislative issues.

Wetland Restoration and Education Project

Mike Pinder, VDGIF Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program

Biologists from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries have been working to restore a wetland located on a public park in Patrick County. This wetland is home to a population of bog turtles (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*), a federal threatened species. Over the last several decades, local landowners have been slowly destroying the wetland by filling in wet areas with spoil material and ditching to speed drainage. Restoration efforts include removing the spoil material, filling in the ditch, and diverting water back into the wetland. The final portion of the project will be the installation of a wooden boardwalk that will lead to an observation platform in the middle of the wetland. Interpretive signs will describe the importance of wetlands as well as many of the animals and plants that depend upon them.

U.S. EPA takes inventory of ecological restoration projects in the mid-Atlantic region

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is developing a web-based inventory of ecological restoration projects within the Mid-Atlantic Region. You are invited to include your restoration projects in the inventory to showcase your restoration efforts and to share lessons learned with other practitioners.

To learn more about this inventory and how to include your projects visit:
<http://www.epa.gov/ttbnrmrl>

Updates to the VHS website Information provided by John White

To begin, if you haven't visited lately, the website has moved to the Virginia Tech server at <http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/VHS/>. Thanks to them for hosting the site.

A new "Photo of the Month" section has been added to the site. And, several new

images from Jason Gibson and Paul Sattler have bolstered the selection of images.

Future web site updates will include:

- An online version of the VHS constitution
- Downloadable/printable tri-fold VHS brochure.
- Dr. Richard Hoffman's notes regarding the possibilities of finding new state species or subspecies.
- And more pictures... Any member is invited to donate photographs of herps not currently displayed on the VHS web site. Images should be 800 x 600 pixels in size and sent to vhsociety@mindspring.com

If members would like to make comments, suggestions or point out errors on the website, please send them to vhsociety@mindspring.com

Many thanks to John White for all of his hard work in developing and improving the Society's web site!

The Discovery of Chicken Turtles in Isle of Wight County

Don Schwab, VDGIF Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program

In June of 1997 the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program at the VA Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries began surveys at the Cat Ponds in Isle of Wight County. Drift fences were erected between several of the sinkhole ponds characteristic of the site. Turtle trapping (aquatic turtle traps) was added to the sampling regime in May 1998. In April 1999 a single female chicken turtle, (*Deirochelys reticularia*), was found in a pitfall trap associated with a drift fence array.

Until this time this species was known in Virginia from just one site in Virginia Beach. Upon this discovery, we began checking the scientific literature and found that the use of fish traps was the most effective method for trapping chicken turtles. From May through August 1999, using the fish traps, 6 additional chicken turtles were collected, marked, and released. One male was trapped twice at separate locations traveling

across an agricultural field, a straight-line distance of 596 m. Twenty-four (24) days had elapsed between the two captures. A gravid female was found on 19 May 1999.

In July 2001 the gravid female from May 1999 was found dead along with 1 other chicken turtle and 7 painted turtles. The cause of death for the 9 specimens appeared to be predation by raccoons. The ponds had dried, and the turtles were likely dug out of the soil while aestivating. Five of the dead turtles (actually, cleaned out shells) were piled at the base of a small tree; the other four were found scattered around the pond. Future study of the species will include radio-telemetry to study movements, habitat use, activity periods, and home ranges.

NE PARC-Working Group Meeting Announced

The Northeast Regional Working Group meeting of the Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (NE PARC) will hold its fourth meeting on October 12-14. The meeting will be held at the Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield, MA.

PARC is a partnership formed in 1998. Its mission is to provide a cooperative program of herpetological research, monitoring, management, policy, and education.

The upcoming meeting has been designed with a hands-on approach. Break-out groups will be developed to facilitate prioritization and goal setting in the following areas: Habitat Management Guidelines, Species/Groups at Risk, and Education and Outreach.

For more information contact Stafford Madison at 617-918-1622 or madison.stafford@epa.gov

Virginia Native

Eastern chicken turtle (*Deirochelys reticularia reticularia*)



Status and Threats:

State endangered. Threats to this species include environmental instability (chronic low water), declining population levels (no recruitment), and heavy predation. Human activity may also be disturbing nesting females.

Characteristics:

The eastern chicken turtle is a moderately sized freshwater turtle with a known maximum carapace length of 254 mm (200 mm is known maximum in Virginia.) The carapace is brown to olive with a lighter colored reticulate or netlike pattern. The forelegs have an anterior broad yellow stripe. Hind legs are vertically striped. Chicken turtles have very long necks reaching nearly the length of the carapace when fully extended. Females are typically larger and have more highly domed shells.

Habits and Habitat:

This species' preferred habitat is freshwater ponds, marshes and sloughs. There is some debate about whether chicken turtles are strictly carnivores or omnivores. There is no recent reproductive data from the Virginia population. However, it is believed that juvenile recruitment is very low. It is known from research elsewhere in their range that clutch size varies from 5 to 11 eggs (21-35 mm in length), and there may be 2 clutches annually. The eastern chicken turtle is a basking turtle, though both sexes travel on land. They may be found partially buried just below the surface of the ground. Life expectancy for this species is 10 to 20 years. The chicken turtle has been understudied throughout its range.

Distribution:

Deirochelys reticularia is very rare in Virginia but common throughout its range. It is widely distributed south of Pamlico Sound in North Carolina to south Florida and west to eastern Texas and Oklahoma. The Virginia population appears to be a disjunct, isolated population. It has been found in northern Virginia Beach and Isle of Wight County.

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Literature Review

The purpose of this column is to inform members of recent herpetological research pertinent to Virginia, its fauna, or of special interest to the Society's membership. Papers or notes from professional journals, new books, "gray literature" reports, and popular magazine articles are acceptable for inclusion. Members are encouraged to send recently published items of interest to the editor. Submissions will be accepted to the approval of the editor. This is not meant to be an exhaustive bibliography.

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Virginia Amphibian Monitoring **Volunteers Needed**

**Why:**

Scientists around the world have become concerned about population declines of several amphibian species. Because of their sensitivity to air and water quality, amphibian populations can serve as an indicator of environmental conditions in their immediate habitat. When long-term standardized monitoring data are collected from across the country, the local, regional and national patterns of amphibian stability or decline can be analyzed. If population declines are observed, we can focus our attention on the causes and work to reverse them.

Who:

The U. S. Geological Survey has developed an international study to investigate the distribution and relative abundance of amphibians in North America called the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program (NAAMP). The VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Wildlife Diversity Division has administered the program for three years...and we still have routes that need volunteers to adopt.

How:

As a volunteer, you will be asked to establish a route with an assigned starting point. You will locate 10 "froggy looking" stations along roadsides from your starting point. You will return to these stations 3 or 4 evenings during the late winter, spring and summer each year. Specific windows of listening periods and conditions have been designated to insure that all possible species could be heard. Your information will then be incorporated into the national database.

Training:

Training sessions are now being planned for November 2001. If you are interested in attending training and receiving an assigned route please provide the following information:

Name:

Address:

County where you live:

The above information should be sent to:

Donald J. Schwab
Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries
5806 Mooretown Rd.
Williamsburg, VA 23188

Or e-mailed to: mgarrett@dgif.state.va.us

Additional Information: Information on date for training session and location will be sent to you sometime in September 2001. Thank you for your interest!



Attention Members!!
VHS Fall Meeting 2001

Where: Annandale Campus of Northern Virginia
Community College

Directions will be available at the VHS website
<http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/VHS/>

When: Saturday, October 27th

More information will be posted on the website above as available. Please check periodically for updates.

For now, the agenda includes an educational workshop, presentations (topics will vary), and business meeting.

If you are interested in making a presentation, please submit a title and abstract to Jason Gibson at the following e-mail address: frogman31@earthlink.net

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please sign me up for membership in the Virginia
Herpetological Society for the year(s) of _____.
Membership begins and ends on a calendar year.

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