



LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

"... conserving our natural resources and your right to enjoy them since 1940."

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Resolution No. 2B, 2017

SUBJECT: ELMER'S ISLAND WILDLIFE REFUGE MANAGEMENT

WHEREAS, Elmer's Island Wildlife Refuge has been a prime destination for generations of anglers, birders, beachgoers, and other outdoor enthusiasts; and

WHEREAS, for many years, Elmer's Island has been well known for its exceptional fishing along the beach, providing recreational anglers access to many popular species including speckled trout, white trout, flounder, redfish, channel mullet, black drum, croaker, and Spanish mackerel, among others; and

WHEREAS, over 170 bird species utilize the refuge at some point in their life cycle, including nesting birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act such as the mottled duck, least tern, Wilson's plover, clapper rail, seaside sparrow, common nighthawk, and willet; and

WHEREAS, nearly 40 bird species are of conservation concern in Louisiana including the piping plover, a species federally listed as threatened and for which Elmer's Island has been designated as Critical Habitat, and red knots, a migratory species also listed as threatened which uses the refuge as a stopover point during a migratory route which can span over 9,000 miles; and

WHEREAS, the refuge is also utilized by diamondback terrapins, a species considered to be imperiled in Louisiana which nests on Elmer's Island and is affected by nest disturbance, habitat loss, commercial take, and mortality due to derelict crab traps; and

WHEREAS, loggerhead sea turtles, green sea turtles, and Kemp's ridley sea turtles, all of which are protected under the Endangered Species Act, occur in Louisiana waters and in 2015 two loggerhead sea turtles made "false crawls", in which they did not construct a nest before returning to the water, indicating that future nests are plausible; and

WHEREAS, recent work by Louisiana's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) temporarily closed Elmer's Island to the public in order to complete the Caminada Headland Beach and Dune Restoration project; and

WHEREAS, while vehicular access was previously allowed on the refuge, upon the reopening of Elmer's Island on October 31, 2016, driving became prohibited "due to Louisiana state law prohibiting driving on an integrated coastal protection project (Louisiana RS 38:213)"; and

WHEREAS, Elmer's Island Refuge is regulated through the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission and managed under the Marine Fisheries Division which collaborates with the Office of Wildlife personnel, including ornithologists and botanists, "when appropriate"; and

WHEREAS, while the Marine Fisheries Division continues to do an excellent job of managing fisheries, they have no expertise in managing land and people; and

(more)

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is charged to “manage, conserve, and promote wise utilization of Louisiana’s renewable fish and wildlife resources and their supporting habitats through replenishment, protection, enhancement, research, development, and education for the social and economic benefit of current and future generations; to provide opportunities for knowledge of the use and enjoyment of these resources; and to promote a safe and healthy environment for the users of the resources”; and

WHEREAS, Elmer’s Island Refuge suffers from a severe lack of enforcement for visitors that ignore refuge safety and environmental regulations, resulting in many instances of littering, damaging dunes with 4-wheel drive vehicles, and nest disturbance.

WHEREAS, in addition to human threats, coyotes along the barrier islands (including Elmer’s Island) are also known to prey on species that use the island for nesting, feeding or resting; and

WHEREAS, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) has a management plan for Elmer’s Island Refuge that is periodically updated and includes information on the island as well as the biological and physical resources, goals and objectives, regulations, and current activities.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation recommends that the LDWF develop a more robust comprehensive management plan that expands on enhanced recreational use coupled with habitat and wildlife protection.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation recommends an updated management plan that considers adding a visitor center as well as more public access points to expand the opportunity for kayak fishing and paddling with parking places for vehicles and launches for kayaks.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation also recommends placement of garbage receptacles on the refuge with funding for adequate maintenance either by LDWF personnel or third party facility maintenance services.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation suggests that the management plan include methods to balance recreation opportunities (such as the long history of successful fishing along the beach) and protection for nesting shorebird and turtle habitats including appropriate protection away from the high water line.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation also suggests adding a coyote control program to protect nesting bird species.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation urges LDWF to increase enforcement of regulations to protect wildlife and preserve the beauty of Elmer’s Island Refuge.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation supports LDWF seeking additional funding from the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill settlement (which directly impacted this habitat and recreational area) and other sources to ensure adequate management of Elmer’s Island Refuge for both people and wildlife.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Louisiana Wildlife Federation recommends transferring regulatory authority from the Marine Fisheries Division to the Division of Wildlife under the WMA program, with personnel collaborating with the Office of Fisheries when appropriate.

Adopted by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation Board of Directors on March 6, 2017