

USFWS issues new Handbook for Mosquito Management on NWRs

In September, 2018, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published their long-awaited “Handbook for Mosquito Management on National Wildlife Refuges” (dated June, 2018), being a 44-pp. guidance document for Refuge Managers dealing with mosquito control needs and practices on NWRs. Upon invitation from the USFWS to review and comment, the AMCA submitted written feedback to the Service in June, 2017 for a penultimate draft version of the Handbook, including recommendations and requests for some changes. In recent years in our getting to this point, we’ve had a lot of constructive interactions with USFWS National IPM Coordinator Cindy Hall.

The new Handbook that came out in September, 2018 is commendable in many ways, and is a significant improvement over earlier versions that took on various forms (e.g. interim guidelines, draft national policies) dating back up to 15 years ago. But unfortunately, 4 significant problems still remain with the Handbook’s contents – 1) too much emphasis on needing evidence of the presence of mosquito-borne disease before being able to treat on-refuge; 2) aversion to adulticide use on-refuge, which if and where or how allowed could be a judicious component in taking an IPM approach to mosquito control work on-refuge; 3) possible need for local mosquito control programs working on-refuge to have to participate in or support post-spray studies, for matters like non-target impacts or spray drift/deposition, possibly doing such on their own time-and-dime; and 4) the Service’s preferred hierarchy for larvicide product use on-refuge, which in many cases could be less than optimal.

On 11/19/18, then AMCA President Bill Walton sent an AMCA letter to USFWS National Wildlife Refuge System Chief Cynthia Martinez reiterating our concerns about these 4 issues, along with some recommendations or requests for changes to the Handbook (that were also first shared with the Service in our June, 2017 written comments). Chief Martinez kindly responded back to the AMCA on 2/21/19 in pretty heartening manner, by not refuting any of our 4 concerns, and seemingly indicating that Refuge Managers will have a lot of latitude and flexibility to address such matters in ways that could be satisfactory to all parties (especially since the new Handbook is but a guidance document). On 3/26/19, AMCA President Jason Kinley and now AMCA Past President Bill Walton jointly sent a letter to Chief Martinez thanking her for her encouraging feedback, and hoped that Refuge Managers will indeed have the discretion to make things work in manner acceptable to all.

Now only time will tell how things might actually turn out, as the Service now goes to issue annual Special Use Permits (SUPs) for 2019 (along with their Special Conditions) that enable local mosquito control programs to work on-refuge, or as the Service updates or pursues other types of arrangements with local mosquito control programs (or vice versa). The AMCA will soon be setting up a communication link regarding how things are presently going on-refuge, to then allow local mosquito control programs to share their experiences (for good or bad) with their AMCA colleagues and AMCA leadership, in what’s now a new era of Handbook implementation. This would also be a communication link for our members to share how other federal agencies, state agencies, or environmental NGOs might now be viewing or using the Service’s new Handbook, to perhaps try to direct or guide mosquito control needs and practices on their lands.