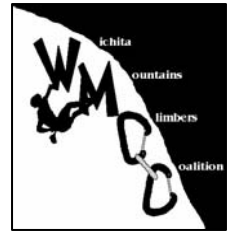


# WICHITA MOUNTAINS CLIMBERS COALITION

.....dedicated to protecting the climbing resources, wildlife  
and habitat, wilderness character, and natural environment  
of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge



June 7, 2007

The Honorable James M. Inhofe  
United States Senator  
453 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510-3603

Re: Technical Rock Climbing  
Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge

Dear Senator Inhofe:

In 1994, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was required under the settlement of a federal lawsuit to conduct compatibility reviews of all secondary uses occurring on all wildlife refuges. At the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in Oklahoma, certain FWS officials at the Refuge and Region 2 office in Albuquerque attempted to use those reviews as an excuse to inappropriately eliminate technical rock climbing activity on the Refuge. However, that action was halted as a result of the work of the Wichita Mountains Access Association and the Access Fund, and the efforts of Oklahoma's State Legislature and Congressional Representatives.

As a result of those efforts, the Refuge determined that technical rock climbing was a compatible secondary use, and the FWS issued a "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI) under the Final Environmental Assessment for Technical Rock Climbing which stated:

"The proposed action represents a reasonable means to ensure that this popular activity does not have a significant negative environmental impact or become incompatible with Refuge purposes, yet remains a viable activity which is critical for overall public and political support of the Refuge and Service."

In 1995, the FWS appointed Sam Waldstein as the new Refuge Manager, and Mr. Waldstein entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the newly formed Wichita Mountains Climbers Coalition (WMCC), a non-profit organization whose purpose is to assist the FWS in managing technical rock climbing activity on the Refuge. Since that time, the partnership between the WMCC and the Refuge has been recognized as a national role model for climber-land manager relations, and the Refuge's climbing management plan has been acknowledged as one of the most successful on any federal land.

Recently, Mr. Waldstein retired and the FWS appointed a new Refuge Manager. In addition to the change in Refuge management, there have also been numerous changes in positions within the FWS at the Region 2 office in Albuquerque, as well as in Washington. As a result, many of those now in position to oversee and regulate public use on the Refuge have little, if any, familiarity with the history of technical rock climbing on the Refuge or of the controversy surrounding the attempt by the FWS to eliminate the activity in the early 1990's.

As you know, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Improvement Act in 1997. Under the act, all existing secondary uses on all refuges are required to be reviewed for compatibility at least once every 10-15 years, depending on the nature of the activity. In addition, all refuges are required to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). The FWS is preparing to undergo those reviews and planning process at the Refuge in the next few months, and the WMCC is concerned that the FWS may once again try to unfairly target technical rock climbing for elimination as a recreational activity on the Refuge.

Enclosed please find a copy of that certain letter dated June 3, 2007 from the WMCC to Refuge Manager Jeff Rupert outlining the concerns of the WMCC over the upcoming compatibility reviews and CCP, as well as a detailed history of climbing on the Refuge and the WMCC's successful partnership with the FWS in managing the activity for over a decade.

Also enclosed please find my letter dated December 1, 1999 to you regarding rock climbing and the use of fixed anchors in designated wilderness areas, which will once again be subject to review by the FWS as part of the Refuge's compatibility review of technical rock climbing. Currently, the WMCC's Advisory Bolting Committee (ABC) works directly with Refuge management to ensure that the occasional use of fixed anchors on the Refuge does not cause significant impacts to wilderness resources or character. That effort has been recognized as one of the best fixed anchor management plans on any federal land in the country.

Technical rock climbing, including the use of fixed anchors, has been an acceptable and compatible use of the Refuge for more than 50 years. Every year, climbers from across Oklahoma and around the region visit the Refuge to experience the unique wilderness climbing adventures it offers. As a result of those experiences and the dedication of the WMCC, climbing is truly one of the most valuable and compatible recreational activities on the Refuge.

The WMCC is requesting your help to ensure that technical rock climbing remains an appropriate and compatible secondary use of the Refuge, and we ask for your personal oversight to guarantee that the FWS conducts a fair and open review and planning process for climbing and all other secondary uses of the Refuge.

On behalf of the thousands of climbers in Oklahoma and around the region who treasure the unique and invaluable climbing opportunities and wilderness adventure offered by the Refuge, the WMCC thanks you for your support and efforts.

Sincerely,

Marion F. Hutchison II  
WMCC Board Member

Encl.

Cc: H. Dale Hall, Director, USFWS  
Geoff Haskett, Chief, Refuges, USFWS  
James W. Kurth, Deputy Chief, Refuges, USFWS  
Dr. Benjamin N. Tuggle, Regional Director, USFWS, Region 2  
Chris Pease, Regional Chief, Refuges, UWFWS, Region 2  
Jeff Rupert, Refuge Manager, Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge