

Replaces Gilmore

Stieglitz heads Fish and Wildlife

by A.J. McClunahan

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The new regional director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska said Native issues will be a key concern of the federal wildlife agency as important decisions are made throughout the state.

The new director, Walter O. Stieglitz, a career service professional, assumed his new duties last month, and already is immersed in such issues

as opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development and proposed land exchanges within the refuge.

Stieglitz, 53, replaces Robert E. Gilmore in the state as the chief wildlife officer for the federal agency. Gilmore recently was reassigned as a special assistant to Fish and Wildlife Service Director Frank Dunkle in Washington, D.C.

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• Job fulfills 'dream'

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A 27-year employee of the service, Stieglitz most recently served as assistant director for refuges and wildlife resources in Washington, D.C. In that role, he was involved with many Alaskan issues, including subsistence, development of ANWR, Alaska refuge comprehensive conservation plans and the Bicentennial Land Heritage Program as it applies to Alaska.

"I'm just really pleased to be here because it's been a lifetime dream," Stieglitz said of his new job. He explained that he grew up in Illinois and has had a lifelong interest in the outdoors.

He called Alaska the "last frontier," which offers many opportunities in the wildlife area. Also, he noted that Fish and Wildlife Service refuges in the state — 77 million acres — account for 86 percent of the nation's refuge system.

One of the most pressing concerns Stieglitz has right now is the ANWR issue. The state recently sharply criticized the Department of Interior's proposal to exchange Native corporation lands in other refuges for subsurface rights in the Coastal Plain in ANWR.

Stieglitz defended that proposal in a recent interview in his office, saying he is "highly concerned" about the extensive inholdings Native cor-

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porations currently have in refuges in the state.

"It complicates management," he said, adding that if the ANWR land swaps are consummated the service could gain "some super-important wildlife habitat."

"I think our proposal is fair to all interests," he said.

Stieglitz also discussed the issue of declining populations of four species of Arctic nesting geese in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and he said Native people in that region are cooperating with the federal agency to solve the problems.

"There won't be dramatic, overnight improvement," he said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is currently developing statewide regulations for migratory birds, as well as specific plans for the Y-K Delta.

Stieglitz said his short-term goals for his new position are to do the best possible job in promoting fish and wildlife in Alaska and to work with all interest groups.

"It's a big job, and it involves lots of people," he said.