

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES  
OFFICE OF WILDLIFE



PERFORMANCE AUDIT  
ISSUED AUGUST 20, 2008

**LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR  
1600 NORTH THIRD STREET  
POST OFFICE BOX 94397  
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70804-9397**

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LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR  
STEVE J. THERIOT, CPA

August 20, 2008

The Honorable Joel T. Chaisson, II,  
President of the Senate  
The Honorable Jim Tucker,  
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Dear Senator Chaisson and Representative Tucker:

This report provides the results of our performance audit of the Office of Wildlife within the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). The audit was conducted under the provisions of Title 24 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, as amended.

The report contains our findings, conclusions, and recommendations on the department's management of wildlife management areas, refuges, and similar properties. Appendix C contains LDWF's response. I hope this report will benefit you in your legislative decision-making process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve J. Theriot".

Steve J. Theriot, CPA  
Legislative Auditor

SJT/dl

LDWF08



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# Office of Legislative Auditor

Steve J. Theriot, CPA, Legislative Auditor

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries  
Office of Wildlife

August 2008



Audit Control # 07501649

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## Executive Summary

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We conducted a performance audit of the Office of Wildlife located within the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). The audit focused on property management. The objective of the audit and the overall audit results are summarized below.

**Objective:** Has LDWF effectively managed the state's wildlife management areas, refuges, and similar properties in accordance with established requirements?

**Performance Audit Findings:** LDWF has made improvements in managing wildlife management areas (WMAs), refuges, and similar properties since this audit began. However, the department needs stronger internal controls and practices to ensure that it manages all properties effectively. Our audit findings describe weaknesses LDWF should address to ensure that it effectively manages properties in accordance with established requirements. The report also includes recommendations intended to assist the department in addressing and correcting those weaknesses. Our findings are as follows:

- LDWF's inventory of acreage it is responsible for managing is not complete or accurate.
- LDWF lacks a comprehensive plan to guide property management activities.
- LDWF has limited public utilization data on which to base property management decisions.
- LDWF does not have a well-defined process for property acquisitions.

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## Audit Initiation, Scope, and Methodology

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The Louisiana Legislative Auditor scheduled this performance audit of LDWF for the 2006-2007 fiscal year. We conducted the audit under the provisions of Title 24 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950, as amended. We focused our work on LDWF's property management activities for WMAs, refuges, and similar properties for fiscal years 2005 through 2007, and included updates through December 2007. The management focus regarding these properties centered on the support, promotion, and enhancement of public hunting, fishing, and recreational opportunities in conformity with Louisiana statutes providing for the department's duties and functions.

In conducting the audit, we followed *Government Auditing Standards* promulgated by the Comptroller General of the United States. We included in the scope of the audit all owned and leased WMAs, refuges, and similar properties managed by the department. We limited our audit work to the property management activities within the Office of Wildlife for WMAs, wildlife refuges, and similar properties such as the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area. To answer our objective, we performed the following:

- Searched state and federal laws, executive budget documents, and the LDWF strategic plan to identify the Office of Wildlife's legal authority, responsibilities, mission, goals, and objectives
- Interviewed Office of Wildlife staff regarding their management practices for WMAs, refuges, and similar properties
- Interviewed other key personnel at LDWF (e.g., Human Resources, Property Management, and budget officials) regarding issues related to the Office of Wildlife's management of WMAs, refuges, and similar properties
- Interviewed officials of relevant agencies within the Division of Administration (i.e., State Land Office and Office of Planning and Budget) regarding issues related to the Office of Wildlife's management practices
- Obtained and examined the Office of Wildlife's acreage inventory and compared it to acreage data maintained by the State Land Office
- Assessed internal controls of data maintained by the agency including file maintenance and data reviews
- Examined the latest federal grants the Office of Wildlife received for land acquisition and management
- Examined existing management plans and compared them to U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service criteria
- Examined LDWF's Web site and assessed it for content and ease of use
- Assessed LDWF's self-clearing permit process for tracking public utilization of properties
- Examined a sample of acquisition records to determine if LDWF had documented why it acquired properties
- Toured Region 6 - Sherburne WMA and met with Region 6 and Region 7 WMA regional managers
- Obtained and examined best practices in government including the Land Trust Alliance and the U.S. Department of the Interior - Bureau of Land Management, and compared them to practices at LDWF

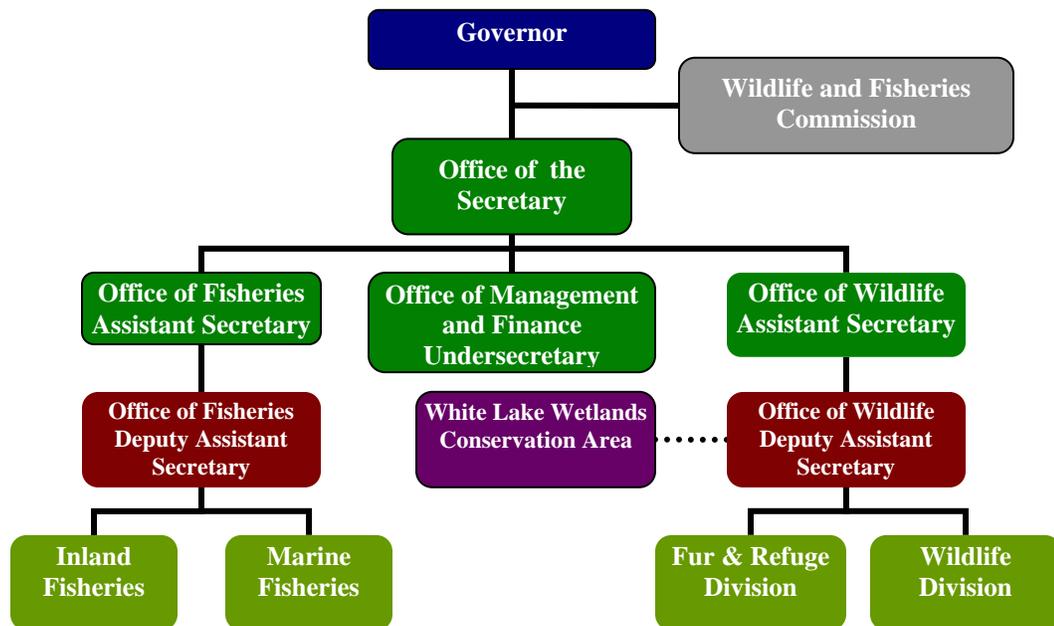
Appendix C contains LDWF's response to this report.

**Overview of the Office of Wildlife**

**Legal Authority.** According to Louisiana Revised Statute (R.S.) 36:609(B), the Office of Wildlife is under the direction of the LDWF secretary. The office is responsible for performing the functions of the state relating to administering and operating programs, including research, relative to wild birds, game, non-game species, threatened and endangered species, certain WMAs, and game preserves. The office is also responsible for maintaining and operating certain WMAs, refuges, and sanctuaries in accordance with policies established by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC).

**Mission and Organizational Structure.** The Office of Wildlife provides stewardship of the state's wildlife and habitats to maintain biodiversity including plant and animal species of special concern. The office also provides outdoor opportunities for present and future generations to engender a greater appreciation of the natural environment. The office accomplishes its mission through two divisions, the Wildlife Division and the Fur & Refuge Division. Exhibit 1 shows the organizational structure of the department.

**Exhibit 1  
Organizational Structure of LDWF**



**Source:** Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information provided by LDWF.

The goals of the Office of Wildlife are to:

- (1) enhance and conserve the habitat necessary to maintain the state’s species diversity and optimum distribution and densities of wildlife populations; and
- (2) increase the opportunities for the public to enjoy their outdoor experiences.

**Functions and Responsibilities.** Exhibit 2 summarizes the main functions and responsibilities of each division within the Office of Wildlife.

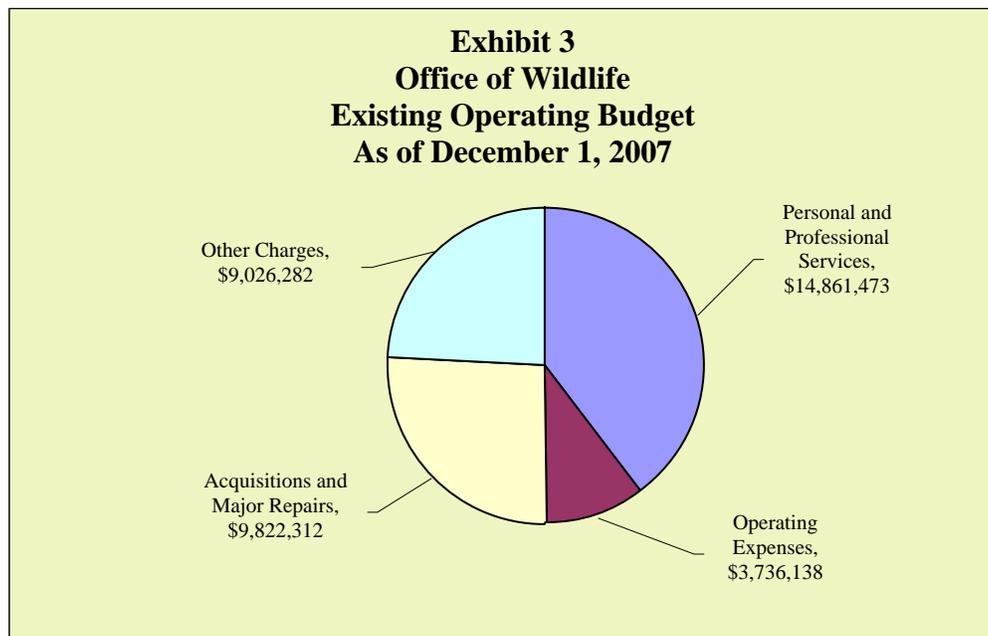
<b>Exhibit 2</b> <b>LDWF Office of Wildlife</b> <b>Functions and Responsibilities of Divisions</b>	
Division	Main Functions and Responsibilities
<b>Wildlife Division</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administers the state’s wildlife conservation program</li> <li>• Gathers biological data to manage wildlife resources</li> <li>• Enhances wildlife habitat and improves infrastructure to accommodate public use of WMAs</li> <li>• Improves forest and wildlife habitat on WMAs through forest management, reforestation practices, and active forest/wildlife research activities</li> <li>• Acquires and develops land for wildlife management purposes</li> <li>• Supervises 48 WMAs in seven regions throughout the state</li> </ul>
<b>Fur &amp; Refuge Division</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides stewardship of wildlife species and habitat in the coastal marsh zone of Louisiana as accomplished through the following responsibilities:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active marsh management</li> <li>• Coastal stewardship operations</li> <li>• Fur and marsh management</li> <li>• Alligator management</li> <li>• Permitting and mineral management</li> <li>• Rockefeller refuge management</li> <li>• Habitat conservation</li> <li>• Education and maintenance</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Supervises nine WMAs and five refuges in Louisiana’s coastal marsh zone</li> </ul>
<p><b>Source:</b> Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information provided in 2006 LDWF Annual Report, 2007 Executive Budget Documents, and information on LDWF Web site.</p>	

**Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs).** R.S. 56:8 (146) defines a WMA as any area set aside, maintained, and supervised by the commission for the purpose of managing and harvesting wild birds, wild quadrupeds, fish, and other aquatic life under controlled conditions to afford maximum public hunting and fishing opportunity. The Office of Wildlife, through its two divisions, maintains and supervises a total of 57 WMAs throughout the state. The Wildlife Division has seven regional offices that are responsible for overseeing and managing 48 of the WMAs in the 64 parishes of the state. The Fur & Refuge Division has two offices and provides oversight and management of the remaining nine WMAs in the coastal marsh area of Louisiana.

**Wildlife Refuges.** R.S. 56:8 (147) defines a wildlife refuge as any area set aside and designated by the commission as a refuge on which wild birds and animals are protected. Control of certain forms of wildlife (e.g., nuisance animals) on refuges may be conducted by the department.

**Similar Properties.** LDWF considers White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (White Lake) a blend between a WMA and a refuge because the property provides both consumptive (e.g., hunting) and non-consumptive (e.g., bird watching) public activities. Organizationally, LDWF has not placed White Lake under either the Wildlife Division or the Fur & Refuge Division. Rather, the department has placed it directly under the Assistant Secretary of Wildlife. Management issues at White Lake receive input and assistance as needed from both the Wildlife Division and the Fur & Refuge Division. Other properties that can be considered similar properties to WMAs and refuges include but may not be limited to Coulee Game Refuge, NW LA Game and Fish Preserve, and Spanish Lake.

**Budget.** The Office of Wildlife’s operating budget for fiscal year 2008 is approximately \$37.4 million. The office has 217 authorized full-time positions to handle the management functions of the office. Exhibit 3 shows a breakdown of the office’s operating budget.



**Source:** Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information obtained from FY 2009 Executive Budget Supporting Document.

**Has LDWF effectively managed the state's wildlife management areas, refuges, and similar properties in accordance with established requirements?**

LDWF has made improvements in managing WMAs, refuges, and similar properties since this audit began. However, the department needs stronger internal controls and practices to ensure that it manages all properties effectively. Our audit findings describe weaknesses LDWF should address to ensure that it manages properties in accordance with established requirements. The report also includes recommendations intended to assist the department in addressing and correcting those weaknesses.

In 1926, Act 273 (which enacted R.S. 56:109) authorized LDWF to establish and manage WMAs, refuges, hunting grounds, and/or outdoor recreation areas. LDWF is responsible for managing WMAs, refuges, and similar properties in accordance with the intended purposes of the properties' acquisition and legal requirements. Office of Wildlife officials said that they manage properties primarily through the following four activities:

1. Creating and maintaining an inventory of properties they manage
2. Developing management plans for the properties
3. Tracking and promoting public utilization of the properties
4. Acquiring additional WMAs, refuges, and similar properties

We focused our audit efforts on these four components of the department's property management system. We discuss our findings related to each component in the following sections.

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**LDWF's Inventory of Acreage It Is Responsible for Managing Is Not Complete or Accurate**

According to LDWF officials, the Office of Wildlife is responsible for creating and maintaining an inventory of all acquisitions, swaps, leases, and sales of acreage for all WMAs and refuges under its management authority. We found that LDWF does not have a complete and accurate accounting of all such lands. For example, the department has not recorded in its inventory all properties managed by the Office of Wildlife. Such properties include those that are similar to WMAs or refuges such as White Lake and Catahoula Lake. In addition, our examination shows that acreage reported in LDWF's inventory is not accurate. Without a complete and accurate inventory, the department cannot ensure that it effectively manages all properties for which it is responsible.

According to LDWF officials, the agency can never know everything that should be included in its inventory because the governor has not signed 16 WMA proclamations. They said that for a WMA to be included in its inventory, the governor must sign a proclamation, as required by R.S. 56:109A. This statute gives the LWFC the discretion to “. . . establish, maintain, and manage any state wildlife management area . . . as it deems proper for wildlife management purposes.” The statute states in specific part: “. . . with the approval of the governor, it may lease, buy, or accept donation of, and set apart, any other lands suitable and desirable for such purposes and there on establish, maintain and operate such areas.” In addition, the law says, “. . . The public shall be notified of the fact of establishment of such areas by publication of a proclamation by the governor. . . .” LDWF officials told us that they believe the proclamation by the governor must be completed to establish a WMA and include the property in its inventory.

We researched the 16 properties LDWF has submitted to the governor for proclamation. We found that all 16 properties are included in LDWF’s inventory of properties managed by the Office of Wildlife. In addition, 10 of the properties have management plans/program narratives on file. Thus, it appears that the department has not interpreted the law to mean that properties should not be included in its inventory until proclaimed by the governor.

After discussing the legal issue surrounding these properties with LDWF officials, we researched it with the assistance of our general counsel’s staff. Our legal research leads us to conclude that once the LWFC obtains the approval of the governor or his designee (i.e., the secretary in this case), the transfer or lease of designated property is complete and the property established. It is also our conclusion that the second part of the statute regarding the proclamation is not an act of transfer. Rather, it is a notice to the public that the transfer has occurred and the land is now available for public use. Therefore, the lack of a proclamation by the governor should not preclude LDWF from including in its inventory all properties established by the LWFC but not yet proclaimed by the governor. We submitted a request to the Louisiana Attorney General for an opinion regarding the intent of R.S. 56:109A outlined in the previous paragraphs. At the time we drafted this report, we were awaiting a formal, written opinion from the Attorney General.

**Recommendation 1:** Once the Attorney General issues a written opinion, LDWF should review it and determine whether properties like the 16 in question should be included in its inventory. If the opinion says that the transfer or lease of property is complete after the LWFC obtains the approval of the governor or his designee (i.e., the LDWF secretary), LDWF should ensure that it includes all such properties in its inventory at that point in the future.

**Summary of Management’s Response:** LDWF’s response states that the governor may soon sign the 16 proclamations thereby eliminating the need for an Attorney General opinion.

**Legislative Auditor’s Additional Comments:** We received the Attorney General’s opinion on August 4, 2008 (after we had drafted this report and received LDWF’s response to it). The Attorney General opined that the LWFC has the authority to select the lands for inclusion in a WMA, the secretary of LDWF has the authority to

approve the selection and acquisition on behalf of the governor, and the LWFC then has the subsequent authority to create the WMA by resolution. Therefore, in the future, the LDWF should consistently include all such properties in its inventory once these three steps are completed.

**LDWF does not have a centralized, comprehensive system that captures all properties managed by the department.**

R.S. 56:109(2)B requires LDWF to submit an annual report to the House and Senate Natural Resources Committees showing the acreage it owns and manages and that is available for public use. To provide this report, LDWF must track its inventory of both owned and leased properties on a regular basis. Despite the legal requirement, neither LDWF nor legislative staff could provide us with evidence that LDWF submitted the report to the legislative committees for the 2006 calendar year.

The Office of Wildlife uses an electronic inventory spreadsheet to track acreage. According to the spreadsheet, as of December 2007, LDWF managed 57 WMAs on 1,305,026 acres throughout Louisiana. Also according to the spreadsheet, LDWF managed five refuges in the coastal south consisting of 169,855 acres. The spreadsheet does not include any information about similar properties under its management authority.

One individual, the Land Acquisition Coordinator, is responsible for tracking all acreage managed by the Office of Wildlife for both the Wildlife Division and the Fur & Refuge Division. The coordinator provides acreage inventory information from the spreadsheet to LDWF officials, Office of Planning and Budget, legislative staff, and other state agencies. Thus, it is important for the spreadsheet to contain complete and accurate information. The spreadsheet does not constitute a comprehensive electronic recordkeeping system, however, because the coordinator reports to only one division (the Wildlife Division) yet is responsible for tracking inventory for both divisions. This arrangement has resulted in incomplete data in the spreadsheet for the Fur & Refuge Division.

We examined supporting documentation the coordinator used to develop the inventory spreadsheet. Our examination identified the following problems:

- **LDWF does not use a central filing system to maintain supporting documents for all properties managed by the two divisions within the Office of Wildlife.** The Land Acquisition Coordinator said that he tracks inventory in the spreadsheet for WMAs and refuges using land conveyance documents. Our examination showed that acreage files and conveyance documents for all WMAs and refuges are not maintained in a central location. We had to go to several sources within LDWF to locate all pertinent documents. In addition, the coordinator has no files for any of the similar properties managed by the Fur & Refuge Division. For instance, he has no acreage information or conveyance documents for White Lake.

- **LDWF does not conduct routine internal checks of its acreage inventory to ensure its accuracy.** The Land Acquisition Coordinator is responsible for tracking and entering into the inventory spreadsheet all leases, acquisitions, swaps, and sales of land for both divisions of the Office of Wildlife. No one conducts internal checks to ensure that the information input into the inventory is accurate or that supporting documentation verifies the information. During our file review, we identified several discrepancies between the inventory and the supporting files as follows:
  - Inaccurate acquisition dates
  - Inaccurate cost information
  - Incomplete funding sources
  - Inaccurate acreage information
- **LDWF maintains only hard copy files of property documents.** LDWF has not converted its hard copy files of land conveyance documents, such as cash sale documents, title work, and property descriptions, to an electronic format. We identified several files dating back more than 50 years and facsimile documents that had begun to fade because of the age and quality of the paper used. In addition, we noted the following:
  - The files were not always alphabetized, and some tracts were located in the wrong WMA folder.
  - Separately acquired tracts within WMAs were not easily identifiable within the files.
  - No log sheets were used to identify the location of pulled files or if all items were put back in the correct order and location after being used.
- **LDWF does not routinely update its inventory.** The Land Acquisition Coordinator provided us with a copy of the inventory spreadsheet, initially created in February 2006. We requested a copy of the spreadsheet in April 2007 and the dates of any updates to the information that had occurred since February 2006. The coordinator could not provide evidence of having updated the spreadsheet. Office of Wildlife officials said that department officials had updated the spreadsheet but that they could not provide documentation of the changes.

According to the April 2007 spreadsheet, LDWF managed 1,463,148 acres on 62 properties. In December 2007, we received an updated copy of the spreadsheet from the coordinator. According to the December spreadsheet, LDWF managed 1,474,882 acres on the same number of properties, for a difference of 11,743 acres. From the December spreadsheet, we also determined that property ownership and leasing of several tracts had changed in October 2006, March 2007, September 2007, and October 2007. The coordinator did not update the

original spreadsheet for these changes until December 2007. The lag between changes in inventory and updating the inventory spreadsheet results in the spreadsheet not accurately reflecting the exact amount of land LDWF owns or leases at any given point in time.

**Acreage reported in management plans/program narratives does not agree with LDWF’s acreage inventory.**

As discussed on pages 17 through 18 of this report, we examined 44 management plans/program narratives<sup>1</sup> for WMAs and refuges. The results of our examination further illustrate the lack of a complete record of acreage managed by the department. Exhibit 4 shows the acreage reported in these documents versus the acreage reported in LDWF’s inventory spreadsheet. Appendix A contains further information on the acreage differences.

<b>Exhibit 4</b>			
<b>Acreage in Management Plans/Program Narratives Versus Acreage in Inventory</b>			
<b>Region/Refuge</b>	<b>Acreage Reported in Management Plans/Program Narratives (Created in 1998)</b>	<b>Acreage Reported in Inventory (as of 12/07)</b>	<b>Difference</b>
WMA Region 1	71,301	77,634	(6,333)
WMA Region 2	46,187	45,989	198
WMA Region 3	99,084	101,194	(2,110)
WMA Region 4	137,849	158,792	(20,943)
WMA Region 5	267,830	264,172	3,658
WMA Region 6	112,860	119,695	(6,835)
WMA Region 7	79,610	163,090	(83,480)
Fur & Refuge - WMAs	198,204	374,460	(176,256)
Subtotal WMA Acreage	1,012,925	1,305,026	(292,101)
Fur & Refuge - Refuges Acreage	162,028	169,855	(7,827)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,174,953</b>	<b>1,474,881</b>	<b>(299,928)</b>
<b>Source:</b> Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information from LDWF records.			

**Recommendation 2:** LDWF should comply with R.S. 56:109.2(B) by submitting an inventory report to the legislature each fiscal year. The department should retain a copy of the report for review purposes and future reference.

**Summary of Management’s Response:** LDWF’s management agrees with this recommendation.

<sup>1</sup> LDWF officials titled 14 of the documents “Management Plan” and 22 documents “Program Narrative.” The other eight documents had no title. Since the content was similar for all documents, we refer to them all as Management Plans/Program Narratives.

**Recommendation 3:** LDWF should evaluate the staffing level of the inventory function and make any adjustments necessary to ensure that it maintains the inventory on a complete and accurate basis.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation. This function will be performed by an attorney in the Legal Section (a new position) instead of a biologist in the Wildlife Division.

**Recommendation 4:** LDWF should convert its land conveyance documents to an electronic filing system. The department should consider a system that links its inventory to the land conveyance supporting documents and makes the information accessible, in a read-only format, to all individuals responsible for managing the properties.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and will research viable options based on its budget limitations.

**Recommendation 5:** LDWF should establish formal policies and procedures that implement controls to ensure that the inventory of properties it manages is updated regularly (i.e., at least annually) and maintained on a complete and accurate basis.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and will implement formal controls after filling the new land management attorney position.

**Recommendation 6:** LDWF should establish procedures to ensure that all documents related to acreage (e.g., management plans/program narratives, the acreage inventory spreadsheet, etc.) consistently contain accurate acreage figures.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and will review documents containing acreage figures for accuracy.

**Comparing LDWF's inventory to SLABS data could help improve the accuracy of LDWF's acreage inventory.**

State law says that the Division of Administration's State Land Office (SLO) is responsible for keeping an inventory of all state property, including the properties managed by LDWF. SLO uses a database called the State Land and Buildings System database, or SLABS, to maintain an inventory of state-owned and leased property. LDWF officials cannot access SLABS or obtain hard copy reports of SLABS information. Therefore, LDWF cannot use SLABS to help verify the information in its inventory spreadsheet.

Office of Wildlife officials said that the property inventory is incomplete because LDWF has no way of knowing that it owns or leases certain properties, mainly water bottoms, until someone expresses an interest in purchasing them. SLO is legislatively mandated to maintain a current master list of state-owned land including water bottoms. A centralized database maintained by SLO and accessible by LDWF on a read-only basis could help LDWF maintain a

more complete and accurate record of property ownership. It would, in turn, provide LDWF with a stronger tool for management to use when making property management decisions.

According to the inventory data we received from SLABS as of April and October of 2007, 63 owned or leased properties fall under the Office of Wildlife’s management responsibility. LDWF’s inventory, however, reported only 62 properties under the office’s responsibility. Exhibit 5 shows the variation in acreage between the SLABS inventory and LDWF inventory.

Exhibit 5 Difference Between SLABS and LDWF Inventories Office of Wildlife Properties				
Properties	SLABS Inventory April 2007	LDWF Inventory April 2007 <sup>1</sup>	SLABS Inventory October 2007	LDWF Inventory December 2007
Total Number of Office of Wildlife Properties Reported in Inventory	63	62	63	62
Total Acreage	<b>1,297,749</b>	<b>1,463,147</b>	<b>1,297,749</b>	<b>1,474,882</b>
<sup>1</sup> LDWF provided us with these data in April 2007; however, LDWF created the inventory spreadsheet in February 2006.				
<b>Source:</b> Prepared by legislative auditor’s staff using information provided by SLABS and LDWF.				

Using the information presented in Exhibit 5, we identified acreage discrepancies between the SLABS and LDWF inventories for 49 properties. The differences in acreage ranged greatly between SLABS and LDWF. For example, SLABS reported that LDWF owned 7,800 acres on Atchafalaya Delta WMA; however, LDWF reported that it owned 141,912 acres on this WMA. This discrepancy equates to a difference of 134,112 fewer acres reported by SLABS than LDWF. In addition, SLABS reported that Russell Sage WMA consisted of 28,109 acres owned by the department, but LDWF reported that it owned only 15,920 acres. This amount is 12,189 fewer acres than reported by SLABS. Appendix B provides a detailed comparison between SLABS and LDWF inventories for all Office of Wildlife properties.

We also identified several properties that were included in the SLABS inventory as Office of Wildlife properties but were not included in LDWF’s inventory. These properties are as follows:

- Coulee Game Refuge.** SLABS identifies this property as managed by LDWF, although it does not report any acreage for the property. The property also appears on LDWF’s Web site. According to the Web site, the Wildlife Division (formerly the Game Division) manages the property. Therefore, it appears that LDWF should have included this property in its inventory. However, LDWF officials said that the property is no longer owned or managed by the department and should not be included in its inventory.
- NW LA Game and Fish Preserve.** According to SLABS, LDWF leases and owns 8,475 acres on this property. LDWF officials said that the department does not manage this complex of land and lakes. They also said that the NW Game

and Fish Preserve Commission may own and/or manage it. R.S. 56:801 provides that preserves and commissions are continued and in full force and effect within LDWF, including the NW Louisiana Game and Fish Preserve Commission. Based on this statutory provision, it appears that LDWF should have included this property in its inventory.

- **Spanish Lake.** According to SLABS, Spanish Lake Game and Fish Preserve (Spanish Lake) is a 1,184-acre lake and 1,316-acre dried lakebed located in both St. Martin and Iberia Parishes. According to SLO officials, the State of Louisiana has owned the property by virtue of inherent sovereignty since 1812. Through various legislative acts beginning in 1940, oversight of the property was placed within LDWF. LDWF officials told us, however, that they have not managed the non-lake acreage of Spanish Lake because of ownership questions on LDWF's behalf that remain unresolved. They also said that the department does not own the property and that the parishes, through the Spanish Lake Game and Fish Preserve Commission (Spanish Lake Commission), are responsible for managing it. State law provides that preserves and commissions cannot promulgate rules (for instance, regarding the use of the properties) without the concurrence of the LWFC. This provision indicates that LDWF retains ownership of and management responsibility for the property and should therefore include it in its inventory.

In addition, according to documents we examined, since 1989 LDWF has sold, through legislative acts, portions of Spanish Lake to various private landowners. The transactions we examined include the sale of 1.5 acres in 2006 to a former Spanish Lake Commission member. In 2007, LDWF sold three tracts totaling 2.185 acres to private individuals. All three tracts sold for \$1,275, or approximately \$584 per acre. LDWF received the proceeds from the sales of these properties. This fact is a further indication that LDWF should have included the property in its inventory as recently as 2007.

- **White Lake.** As previously mentioned, LDWF considers White Lake to be a blend between a WMA and a refuge. White Lake consists of over 71,000 acres managed by the Fur & Refuge Division with input from the Wildlife Division, according to Office of Wildlife officials. Based on this information, it appears that LDWF should have included this property in its inventory.

In addition, we identified one property, Catahoula Lake, which neither SLABS nor the LDWF inventory showed as owned or leased by LDWF. LDWF reported the property to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in a 2007-2008 Federal Aid Plan as a WMA managed by the Wildlife Division, however. In the plan, LDWF identified Catahoula Lake as 36,000 acres managed by the Region 3 WMA Division. In addition, Office of Wildlife officials told us that the department manages the property. Therefore, it appears that this property should have been included in the inventories of both SLABS and LDWF.

Overall, LDWF does not have a complete and accurate record of all properties it is responsible for managing. Therefore, the department cannot ensure that it manages all properties under its management responsibility. A centralized, updated database for land inventory would provide the department with a complete and accurate record of properties for which it is responsible. It would also give LDWF management a stronger tool to use when making property management decisions.

**Recommendation 7:** LDWF should work with SLO to either obtain read-only access to SLABS or receive periodic hard copy inventory reports. LDWF should then use that information to help verify its own inventory.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and will contact SLO about getting access to its system. Some discrepancies, however, will always be present.

**Recommendation 8:** LDWF should work with SLO to resolve the land inventory discrepancies cited in this section of the audit report and to ensure that information contained in SLABS relative to properties owned or leased by LDWF is complete, accurate, and current.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and will work with SLO subject to staffing and budget constraints.

**Recommendation 9:** LDWF should resolve the management issues of NW LA Game and Fish Preserve. The department should also resolve the ownership issues of Spanish Lake and determine what its responsibilities are for this property. One option is for LDWF to ask SLO to request more in-depth information from the local clerks of court and then provide copies of the documents it receives to LDWF.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation.

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## **LDWF Lacks a Comprehensive Plan to Guide Property Management Activities**

LDWF has not developed a comprehensive management plan that contains specific management goals and operational guidance for each property it is responsible for managing. LDWF provided us with four different types of documents as evidence of its management activities. The documents provide only general narrative, forestry, regional, and ecosystem information, however, not management activity information for individual properties. Taken together, the documents do not provide information on LDWF's overall property management activities throughout the state.

According to the USFWS, management plans should provide the following information:

- A clear statement of management direction
- An understanding of management actions on and around the property to the public and government officials
- Assurance that management actions, including land protection and recreation/education programs, are consistent with the mandates of the WMA and refuge systems
- A basis for the development of budget requests for operations, maintenance, and capital improvement needs

The documents LDWF provided to us do not include these elements.

To illustrate this point, USFWS conducted an audit in 2005 of the Rockefeller Refuge, a property that receives federal funding for its operations. The audit reported that both Office of Wildlife and Fur & Refuge Division officials were managing the refuge in accordance with the Rockefeller Deed of Donation. It recommended, however, that LDWF consider developing general management goals and operational plans for all Rockefeller management units. The audit also recommended that the plans include management goals and general operational guidance. Following is a discussion of the four types of documents LDWF provided to us.

### **1. Management Plans/Program Narratives**

During the audit, we requested management plans for all 57 WMAs and five refuges from Office of Wildlife officials. We received 44 documents (41 for WMAs and three for refuges). The title on 14 of these documents is “Five Year Management Plan.” Twenty-two documents are titled “Program Narrative.” The other eight documents do not have a title. All of the documents contain the same type of information; therefore, as mentioned previously, we refer to all of them as management plans/program narratives.

Overall, LDWF could not provide us with management plans/program narratives for 28% of the WMAs and 40% of the refuges it is responsible for managing. In addition, the department has developed management plans or program narratives for only some of the properties that are similar to WMAs and refuges. The management plan for one of these properties (White Lake) is only a draft created in 2002 that has not been finalized.

We examined the 44 management plans/program narratives that LDWF provided to us and noted that they were all created in 1998. We also noted that they are all narrative and descriptive in nature. The documents lack management goals and objectives unique and specific to the reasons why the WMAs and refuges were established. For example, they do not include goals that identify and focus management priorities and provide a link between management actions, legal requirements, and

LDWF policies and procedures. They also do not include objectives that are specific to the individual properties.

In addition, all of the management plans/program narratives are more than 10 years old. LDWF has not required its regional managers to routinely (e.g., annually, quarterly, monthly, etc.) review the documents and adjust them for relevant changes. For example, the managers have not updated the documents to account for issues such as:

- Changes in the condition of the land
- Changes in land use
- Increased or decreased acreage
- Advances in scientific practice
- Increases and decreases in public usage

As a result, the divisions may use goals and objectives that are no longer relevant because of changing priorities and resource management approaches. In addition, LDWF does not have management plans/program narratives in place for properties acquired after 1998, such as Maurepas Swamp and other tracts added to already existing WMAs or refuges.

According to Fur & Refuge Division officials, the purpose of the original 1998 management plans/program narratives was to serve as background information for new employees, legislators, citizens, and non-governmental organizations. In addition, Wildlife Division officials said that they do not update the documents to guide maintenance and development of properties. Both divisions acknowledged, however, that the documents are outdated and need to be updated for better planning purposes.

When we met with department officials to review a draft of this audit report, they provided us with 38 additional documents they said were updates to the management plans/program narratives prepared in 2003. We examined these one-page documents and found that the descriptions provide more current information on acreage and limited information on the terrain, vegetation, and management efforts. However, they lack management goals and objectives unique and specific to individual properties. Also, all of the updates are for WMAs. None of them are for refuges or similar properties.

## **2. Wildlife Action Plans (WAPs)**

Created in December 2005, LDWF uses WAPs when reviewing potential properties for purchase. WAPs are documents that contain broad categories of wildlife species and habitats to conserve in the state. LDWF officials stated that they also use WAPs as a guide for management activities. The WAPs contain comprehensive information statewide broken down by eco-regions, aquatic basins, and marine systems. They do not provide information specific to management activities on specific properties.

This lack of detail leaves readers without a general understanding of what management activities LDWF employs for the various properties.

### **3. 1-Year Federal Aid Plan**

This document provides an overall view of the seven WMA regions in the state. The Wildlife Division submitted a 1-year plan to the USFWS for 2007 through 2008 for the maintenance and overall management of the WMAs. The information in the document is vague in that it does not include management of resources, species, or habitats on the WMAs in the various regions. The plan provides only maintenance activities for buildings, bridges, roads, and other projects undertaken by employees of the regions. In addition, cost and maintenance information are not broken down by WMA, so readers cannot determine how LDWF will use established funding, for which WMAs funding will be used, how funding was determined, or the management activities for each individual WMA.

### **4. Forestry Plans**

In addition to the Federal Aid plans, LDWF creates forestry plans (also referred to as forestry prescriptions) for any new areas added to the WMA system, according to Wildlife officials. The prescriptions are specific to certain areas or compartments of individual WMAs' forest resources. They do not include information on the overall management of entire properties. In addition, LDWF has created the General Forest Management Plan (GFMP), an overall policy on how to design and implement a forestry plan. This document is not specific to individual WMAs, but rather a broad overview of all forestry resources in the state. In addition, the GFMP provides only general guidance to the Forestry Section of the Wildlife Division for management of forest resources on the WMAs. It does not provide guidance for the management of hiking/biking trails, tent camping areas, boat launches, bird watching areas, and other activities.

Overall, the four types of documents LDWF provided to us do not constitute a comprehensive management plan for each property the Office of Wildlife is responsible for managing. None of the documents alone, or taken together, provides general management goals and operational guidance for each individual WMA, refuge, or similar property. Having a comprehensive management plan for each WMA, refuge, and similar property that is consistently updated and revised would help LDWF to more effectively manage the properties under its authority.

**Recommendation 10:** LDWF should develop a single comprehensive management plan for each property under its management responsibility. The plans should include management goals and objectives specific to individual properties.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management partially agrees with this recommendation. Management has developed a comprehensive management plan for the Rockefeller Refuge and will develop similar plans for all other managed properties. However, the LDWF-owned WMAs under the Wildlife Division's authority are managed under a GFMP, which is updated periodically. Other WMA specific

objectives and goals are spelled out in the WMA narratives and will be updated every 10 years.

**Legislative Auditor's Additional Comments:** The GFMP is not inclusive of all activities on the properties and does not include management practices for consumptive and non-consumptive activities. It is a plan for how to manage the land and biological resources in particular compartments and does not include information on users of the properties or how to increase or improve the properties for public consumption.

**Recommendation 11:** LDWF should periodically review all management plans and adjust them for changes in the condition of the land, changes in land use, increased or decreased acreage, advances in scientific practice, and increases or decreases in public usage. The adjustments should include budget, staffing, and other changes necessary to address these issues.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management partially agrees with this recommendation. LDWF budgets by regions that encompass multiple areas rather than by individual areas. Adjustment for changes in land condition, land use, acreage, scientific practice, and public usage occurs through the department's adaptive management of these properties.

**LDWF has not conducted routine inspections of WMAs, refuges, and similar properties.**

LDWF has not routinely monitored properties to ensure compliance with established documents created to provide management guidance. R.S. 56:109.2 requires LDWF to manage WMAs and other departmental properties in a way that supports, promotes, and enhances public opportunities. Having monitoring strategies to ensure compliance with management plans would help LDWF ensure that it manages all properties in accordance with statutory and other requirements.

The Office of Wildlife lacks strategies for monitoring the overall management of properties. For example, officials within the office have not developed formal monitoring practices or procedures for evaluating properties on a regular and continual basis. They have relied heavily on institutional knowledge and trust of property managers rather than physical site visits. This approach could render a less effective means of ensuring that the office manages properties in accordance with management plans, deeds of donation, and the reasons for establishing the properties. According to the USFWS, monitoring and evaluating property is necessary to determine whether the management staff is making progress in achieving the purpose(s), vision, and goals of the property.

Office of Wildlife officials told us that they do conduct some surprise visits of certain properties throughout the year to check for potential problems. At the time of our fieldwork, we found that these surprise visits did not ensure that officials visited all properties at regular intervals. In addition, the office has not documented the visits or any findings or problems identified during the visits. Because LDWF has not tracked or documented adjustments needed to improve management, it has limited approaches for dealing with problems identified during the visits. The results of monitoring may indicate the need to modify objectives or strategies for

certain properties. At a meeting to discuss a draft of this report, an official said that in November 2007, the Office of Wildlife began using biologists in each region to conduct inspections.

**Recommendation 12:** LDWF should develop and implement strong monitoring and evaluation strategies to ensure that LDWF effectively manages properties in accordance with established management plans and laws.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and notes that its staff has conducted inspections but has not documented them consistently. Management will develop a monitoring plan to address the concerns. A strong long-term monitoring program, which focuses on monitoring habitat and forest resource changes over 10 year periods as a result of anthropogenic and natural causes, is established and carried out for all department-owned WMAs.

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### **LDWF Has Limited Public Utilization Data on Which to Base Property Management Decisions**

LDWF collects limited public utilization data for the majority of WMAs it manages. For example, the department does not collect public utilization data for refuges or similar properties such as White Lake. In addition, according to LDWF officials, they conduct bag checks, head counts, and car counts for managed hunts and lottery hunts. However, they do not consistently conduct these same counts and bag checks on regular non-managed hunting days. In addition, LDWF did not provide us with head and car count documentation for non-consumptive activities. The lack of complete and reliable information about the public's use of properties hampers the department's ability to make effective property management decisions.

State law requires LDWF to manage WMAs and other properties in a way that supports, promotes, and enhances public opportunities. State law also requires the department to make property management decisions using public opportunities as a primary consideration. The department uses self-clearing permits to capture public utilization of the WMAs it manages. Self-clearing permits are forms that property users fill out to capture utilization information for specific days or timeframes (e.g., weeks, weekends, etc.). According to LDWF officials, the permits are the primary means the department has for tracking public usage of properties. They also said that without additional personnel, technology, and equipment, the department cannot change how it currently captures public utilization data.

**Public utilization data are not complete, and LDWF's data collection methods are not consistent.**

According to Louisiana Administrative Code 76 19:111(G)(2), the public must complete self-clearing permits for all activities in which they participate on all WMAs unless otherwise specified. The law makes no mention of self-clearing permits for refuges and similar properties. Because LDWF does not capture public utilization information for all properties managed by the Office of Wildlife, it lacks complete information on the public's use of those properties.

In addition, according to Wildlife Division officials, compliance with the WMA self-clearing permit requirements is relatively low. They said that the permits capture only about 40% to 50% of utilization on the WMAs. Therefore, the information provided by the permits is not a complete representation of all usage of the WMAs.

During the audit, we requested copies of all documentation LDWF uses as public utilization data. Department officials gave us the self-clearing permit information. At our meeting to discuss the audit report draft, however, department officials said that their staff also uses additional methods to collect public utilization data. After the meeting, they provided us with hard copy examples of these other methods. The documents included data collected from bag checks of the number of animals killed, car counts, and head counts. However, the data were not collected in a consistent manner from day to day or WMA to WMA. For example, some WMAs provided head count and car count information for managed hunts and/or lottery hunts where LDWF knows the number of hunters in advance. The same regions did not provide information for routine, non-managed hunting activities on the same property. In addition, LDWF did not provide head count and car count information for non-consumptive activities on the WMAs. The information focused only on consumptive activities and appeared to occur at various times throughout the year.

LDWF does not have a formal policy establishing when WMA personnel are to conduct bag checks, car counts, and head counts, resulting in inconsistent data collection throughout the state. LDWF officials also said that the department does not conduct any additional data collection (besides self-clearing permits) on the smaller WMAs. For example, LDWF relies only on self-clearing permits for Hutchinson Creek (129 acres) and Elbow Slough (160 acres), where minimal hunting activity occurs throughout the year. LDWF cited a lack of personnel as the primary reason for a gap in data collection.

Having complete public utilization data collected in a consistent manner is critical for management to make effective property management decisions and policies. Basing decisions on incomplete data, such as those provided by the self-clearing permits, or data that are not collected consistently, such as those provided by the bag checks and head and car counts, could result in LDWF acquiring or disposing of property that is not in the best interest of the department or the public. It could also result in inappropriately limiting or expanding public activities on properties managed by the department. For these reasons, it is important for the department to develop a better means of collecting public utilization data.

**Recommendation 13:** Since LDWF captures data only for WMAs, the department should develop a means of capturing public utilization data for refuges and similar properties.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and will retain the use of self-clearing permits where appropriate and develop other means for other areas. LDWF collects public utilization data via car counters and creel surveys at all entrances of Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge.

**Recommendation 14:** LDWF should implement a procedure for collecting public utilization data for all activities on all WMAs, refuges, and similar properties. The procedure should provide for the use of proven data collection methods applied on a consistent basis for each property.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF agrees with this recommendation and will develop policies and procedures to the extent possible/practical based on available resources as some WMAs and refuges are difficult to access.

**LDWF cannot ensure that self-clearing permit data it reports are reliable.**

According to WMA regional managers we interviewed, WMA technicians collect self-clearing permits from permit stations every day, every two weeks, or once a month during peak hunting seasons depending on the WMA. During less popular times, they may collect the permits only once every three months. The technicians enter and compile the information into a spreadsheet by region and activity. They submit the spreadsheet to officials in each region and dispose of the self-clearing permits. The officials review the spreadsheet and submit it to the LDWF staff that creates the department's performance indicator data.

Because the technicians dispose of the original self-clearing permits, we could not verify that the information in the spreadsheet was accurate or complete. Also, the destruction of the original documents means that LDWF cannot ensure that the information they report in performance indicators is reliable. This issue is important because the performance indicators are subject to review and approval by the legislature through the appropriations process.

We also identified several additional problems with the self-clearing permits that contribute to making the data unreliable. Those problems are as follows:

- **Staff does not conduct internal checks of the spreadsheet information to ensure the data's accuracy.** Once technicians input information from the self-clearing permits into the spreadsheet, no one compares the data they entered to the permits before they are destroyed to verify that technicians entered the data correctly. Thus, there is no assurance that the data in the spreadsheet are accurate.
- **LDWF has not provided consistent and easy-to-follow information to the public on completing the self-clearing permits.** Two sources, the summary pages of LDWF's Web site and the *WMA Regulations and Seasons Digest*, specify the requirements and exceptions for self-clearing permits. The public can review the Web site or the digest information to determine which WMAs and activities require the submittal of self-clearing permits. The information provided by these sources is poorly organized and difficult to understand. Overall, the information is confusing, hard to follow, and, in some cases, contradictory. The poor quality of the information could lead to reduced compliance by the public with self-clearing permit requirements. Exhibit 6 on the following page lists the requirements and exceptions to the self-clearing permit requirements found on the

WMA Web site and in the *WMA Regulations and Seasons Digest* and illustrates the differences between the two information sources.

<b>Exhibit 6</b> <b>Self-Clearing Permit Requirements and Exceptions</b> <b>for Wildlife Management Areas</b>		
<b>WMA Exception or Regulation</b>	<b>LDWF Web Site</b>	<b>WMA Regulations Digest</b>
Number of WMAs with self-clearing permit requirement or exception specified	20	22
Number of WMAs without self-clearing permit requirement or exception specified	34	26
Number of WMAs for which “Self-Clearing Permit Not Required” is explicitly stated	2	3
Number of WMAs not found on Web site or in digest	1	6
<b>Source:</b> Legislative auditor’s analysis of information on LDWF’s Web site and in <i>WMA Regulations and Seasons Digest</i> .		

**Recommendation 15:** LDWF should explore additional methods of capturing public utilization data rather than relying primarily on self-clearing permit information. Two possibilities might be electronic scanning of licenses (using barcodes) and online surveys.

**Summary of Management’s Response:** LDWF’s management agrees with this recommendation. Management does use car counts, bag checks, and creel counts. Electronic scanning of licenses may be cost prohibitive, and online surveys have had a lower response rate than self clearing permits.

**Recommendation 16:** If LDWF continues to use self-clearing permits to capture public utilization data, it should implement controls to ensure that the data are complete and reliable. Such controls might include the following:

- Reviewing data entered into electronic spreadsheets to ensure that they were entered properly
- Retaining completed self-clearing permits so they can be used to verify information in spreadsheets
- Conducting head counts, car counts, and bag checks of users on properties the department manages in a consistent manner

**Summary of Management' Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and will implement controls encompassing review of self-clearing permit data; retention of original permits; and periodic head counts, car counts, and bag checks where applicable.

**Recommendation 17:** If LDWF continues using self-clearing permits, it should also ensure that the public receives complete, easy-to-understand, easy-to-access, and consistent information on the self-clearing permit requirements for each property it manages. In addition, the department should implement controls to ensure that the public complies with the self-clearing permit requirements established by the Office of Wildlife. Such controls might include providing the public with readily available information that is easy to follow.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and will revise material provided to the public.

**LDWF cannot rely on public utilization data it collects to make property management decisions.**

R.S. 56:109.2(A) provides that LDWF shall manage WMAs and other public areas in a way that supports, promotes, and enhances public opportunities. The law further requires the department to make property management decisions using public hunting, fishing, and recreational opportunities as a primary consideration. The lack of complete, consistently collected, and reliable public utilization data hampers LDWF's ability to make wise property management decisions.

For instance, management cannot proactively identify and effectively address issues relative to activities most sought after by the public. This situation could affect the department's ability to accomplish its mission. In addition, management cannot ensure that it effectively allocates personnel to those properties most or least used by the public.

**Recommendation 18:** Once LDWF implements a more effective system of capturing public utilization data, management should use the data to make sound decisions related to public use of lands, land acquisition, and other related issues.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management partially agrees with this recommendation. Management has used public utilization data informally for decision making purposes and will endeavor to formalize its use in the future.

**LDWF could better promote utilization of properties by enhancing its Web site.**

To effectively promote and manage properties for which it is responsible, LDWF needs to provide reliable information to the public in a timely and consistent manner. We identified several areas in which LDWF could improve its Web site to better disseminate information to the public. The following paragraphs describe issues LDWF should address regarding the availability and flow of information about public use of properties on its Web site.

The department's Web site does not contain information sorted by activity for each property. Activities include, for example, tent camping, bird watching, and hiking. A user has to search each individual property's Web page to identify activities that are available to the public on each property. Also, the information provides details on the landscape of individual properties but not always activities that are available on the properties. Users must often call the LDWF central office or other contacts provided on the Web page to determine if activities in which they are interested are available on certain properties.

The Web site also does not list all activities for all WMAs and refuges. In addition, it provides limited information on activities available on similar properties. We also noted that the Web site does not list one WMA that the department includes in its inventory. Therefore, users cannot identify activities that are available on that particular property.

Overall, the Web site information is cumbersome and difficult to navigate. Users have to search several areas to find desired information and to identify places where they can hunt, fish, bike, hike, or participate in other activities. The amount of time needed to identify where individuals can participate in outdoor activities may deter public use of department-managed properties.

**Recommendation 19:** LDWF should resolve the problems associated with its Web site that are cited in this section of the audit report. The Web site should prominently display, throughout the year, a list of all activities permitted on each property the department manages as well as all requirements for using each property in an easy-to-navigate fashion.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and is working to resolve the issue.

**Recommendation 20:** LDWF should enhance its Web site to promote public usage of state-managed lands. For example, the department should make the Web site more appealing to specific, targeted markets it identifies as potential users of the properties it manages, such as teenagers and retirees.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management partially agrees with this recommendation. Management believes it should target audiences based on activities instead of demographic groups. The department may test some experimental demographic focus for response, however.

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## **LDWF Does Not Have a Well-Defined Process for Property Acquisitions**

R.S. 56:702 authorizes the LWFC to acquire by purchase, gift, expropriation or otherwise any property necessary, useful, or convenient for use by the commission (the policy-making and budgetary control board overseeing LDWF). LDWF does not, however, have a well-defined and documented acquisition process. A well-defined process with specific criteria would help the department ensure that acquisition projects are sound, viable, and consistent with the Office of Wildlife's mission.

**LDWF does not have a documented plan for acquiring new properties.**

According to LDWF budget and land acquisition officials, since FY 2004, the department has accumulated \$16 million in capital outlay funds to acquire new property. The department has expended approximately \$1.5 million of these funds to acquire 16,312 acres. The funds used to acquire property cover only the costs of acquisition, not the management and operational costs of the property.

The land acquisition coordinator handles all land acquisitions for the department. According to this individual, in November 2007, LDWF staffed his position as a full-time position after two years as a part-time position. He also said that he has not aggressively pursued land acquisitions because of time and staffing constraints.

The Land Trust Alliance is an organization that assists with the acquisition of wildlife habitats, recreational areas, and other important lands. According to the alliance, agencies should develop a well-defined process and establish criteria to ensure that the land projects they select are sound, viable, and consistent with the agency's mission. LDWF has not developed criteria to use in its land acquisition program. For example, it has not developed guidelines to help management determine whether potential acquisition projects meet minimum acceptable standards that qualify them for consideration. It also has no guidelines to help management determine which properties meet the department's goals.

**Recommendation 21:** LDWF should evaluate the staffing level(s) of the land acquisition program and make any necessary adjustments.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation. See its response to Recommendation 3 on page 13.

**Recommendation 22:** LDWF should design and implement a comprehensive land acquisition process including criteria for staff to follow to ensure that projects meet the established goals and objectives of the program.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and will work with the new land management attorney to implement formal processes and criteria.

**LDWF needs better documentation to support property acquisitions.**

LDWF officials said that it is in the best interest of the department and the public to purchase property when funding is available. They also said that LDWF is not in the business of disposing of property. According to LDWF officials, when funding is available, they focus on acquiring properties that are adjacent to or within the boundaries of existing WMAs. Before adding to existing WMAs, they consider factors such as location, size, habitat condition, funding, cost, long-term benefit, and goals of the department. LDWF does not have a formalized or documented process for identifying and verifying these factors for each land acquisition. As a

result, we could not verify that LDWF's acquisition process is appropriate or consistent with the factors identified previously.

R.S. 56:1922 specifies the procedures LDWF must undertake to acquire property. The statute provides requirements only for properties acquired using Wildlife Habitat and Natural Heritage Trust (WHNHT) funds. We examined the files for 26 tracts of land on 11 WMAs acquired with WHNHT funds to determine whether LDWF followed the criteria established in law. We found that the department developed criteria outlining objectives and methodology for acquiring the property for only one tract of land on one WMA. For the remaining 25 tracts, we found no criteria documenting why LDWF had acquired the property. In addition, we could not locate any information in LDWF's files for three tracts of land. Therefore, we could not verify the cost, acreage, or criteria for the acquisition of those tracts. The department has also not developed a checklist or other means to record its actions throughout the acquisition process. Without checklists or similar documentation, it is difficult to determine whether LDWF staff followed prescribed steps on each transaction.

Implementing stronger documentation procedures would help LDWF in the land acquisition process. Without a clear, documented project selection process, LDWF risks internal conflicts and public criticism of purchases it makes. It also risks accepting projects that do not make wise use of its financial resources.

**Recommendation 23:** LDWF should implement strong documentation procedures for property acquisitions such as checklists or other forms of documentation. The department should also establish prioritization schedules to ensure that properties most in line with its goals and mission are acquired first.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and will work with the new land management attorney to formalize selection criteria and processes.

### **LDWF lacks guidance, goals, and expectations for property acquisitions.**

The USFWS provides oversight of the LDWF's expenditure of federal funds but does not provide regular, day-to-day oversight of LDWF's property acquisition program. As a result, more responsibility for oversight rests with the LWFC. The commission has not taken the lead in overseeing the land acquisition program due in part to a lack of information.

According to the LDWF Land Acquisition Coordinator, the LWFC has not established goals and expectations for the land acquisition program. Also, the commission does not require land acquisition staff to provide documentation on new and potential acquisitions. In 1997, the commission passed a resolution allowing the commission chairman and department secretary to approve and finalize all land acquisitions without approval from the full commission. The staff provides little to no written analysis of land acquisition projects to the commission. Staff analyses would assist the chairman and secretary in determining whether projects meet the mission and goals of the department.

In addition, LDWF does not conduct studies to determine when and where to acquire new land or if acquisitions meet the mission and goals of the department and the Office of Wildlife. LDWF's strategic plan for FY 2009 through FY 2013 makes no mention of land acquisition programs or activities. For example, it contains no objectives or strategies for ranking available tracts according to their ability to meet the department's mission and goals.

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 96 of the 2007 Regular Legislative Session urges LDWF to develop a priority listing of unprotected wildlife habitats. It also urges the department to recommend strategies for funding the acquisition and protection of such habitats. LDWF officials told us that the prioritization listing would take approximately two years to implement. In the meantime, land acquisition staff has little to no guidance for operating the acquisition program.

Without clear and specific guidelines and goals for acquiring land, LDWF risks internal budgetary conflicts between LDWF offices and divisions, difficult property management issues, and public criticism. It also risks making acquisitions that do not make wise use of the department's financial resources or that do not significantly further the mission of the department. For these reasons, it is important for LDWF to provide its employees with specific guidelines and goals for acquiring lands.

**Recommendation 24:** LDWF should develop goals, objectives, and criteria for its land acquisition program that meet the mission of the department. The department should amend its strategic plan to include those goals and objectives.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation.

**Recommendation 25:** The LWFC chair and department secretary should require adequate documentation and analysis from LDWF staff when considering land acquisitions to ensure that potential acquisitions are in line with established goals and objectives.

**Summary of Management's Response:** LDWF's management agrees with this recommendation and notes that when making land acquisition decisions, the LWFC chair and secretary do receive documentation and analysis from the staff, but it is not always consistent and formalized. Management will develop and implement a written checklist to ensure compliance with R.S. 56:1922 and to ensure that acquisitions are in line with established goals and objectives.

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Appendix A					
Comparison of Acreage Per LDWF Management Plans and Inventory					
Number of Properties	Property	Management Plan?	Acreage Per 1998 Management Plan	Acreage Per December 2007 Inventory	Difference
<b>Wildlife Region 1</b>					
1	Bayou Pierre	Yes	1,379	2,212	(833)
2	Bodcau	Yes	32,471	34,355	(1,884)
3	Jackson-Bienville	Yes	32,000	32,185	(185)
4	Loggy Bayou	Yes	4,211	6,382	(2,171)
5	Soda Lake	Yes	1,240	2,500	(1,260)
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>71,301</b>	<b>77,634</b>	<b>(6,333)</b>
<b>Wildlife Region 2</b>					
1	Bayou Macon	Yes	6,940	6,919	21
2	Big Colewa Bayou	Yes	370	899	(529)
3	Floy McElroy	No	0	681	(681)
4	Ouachita	Yes	8,745	10,377	(1,632)
5	Russell Sage	Yes	17,280	15,920	1,360
6	Union	Yes	12,852	11,193	1,659
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>46,187</b>	<b>45,989</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>Wildlife Region 3</b>					
1	Alexander State Forest	Yes	8,092	8,158	(66)
2	Camp Beaugard	Yes	12,500	12,500	0
3	Dewey Wills	Yes	60,276	61,871	(1,595)
4	Elbow Slough	Yes	160	160	0
5	Little River	Yes	3,276	4,799	(1,523)
6	Sabine	Yes	14,780	13,706	1,074
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>99,084</b>	<b>101,194</b>	<b>(2,110)</b>
<b>Wildlife Region 4</b>					
1	Big Lake	Yes	19,221	19,231	(10)
2	Boeuf	Yes	47,864	50,967	(3,103)
3	Buckhorn	No	0	11,264	(11,264)
4	Red River/Three Rivers*	Yes	63,300	69,806	(6,506)
5	Sicily Island Hills	Yes	7,464	7,524	(60)
6	Three Rivers*	Yes	See Red River	See Red River	See Red River
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>137,849</b>	<b>158,792</b>	<b>(20,943)</b>
*LDWF prepared one management plan for both contiguous properties. Because both properties are represented, they are considered two plans.					

(Continued)

Appendix A					
Comparison of Acreage Per LDWF Management Plans and Inventory					
Number of Properties	Property	Management Plan?	Acreage Per 1998 Management Plan	Acreage Per December 2007 Inventory	Difference
<b>Wildlife Region 5</b>					
1	Boise Vernon/Clear Creek	Yes	54,269	55,672	(1,403)
2	Fort Polk	Yes	109,855	105,545	4,310
3	Marsh Bayou	No	0	655	(655)
4	Peason Ridge	Yes	33,488	33,010	478
5	Sabine Island	Yes	8,103	8,695	(592)
6	Walnut Hill	No	0	595	(595)
7	West Bay	Yes	62,115	60,000	2,115
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>267,830</b>	<b>264,172</b>	<b>3,658</b>
<b>Wildlife Region 6</b>					
1	Acadiana Conservation Corridor	No	0	2,285	(2,285)
2	Attakapas	Yes	26,300	27,930	(1,630)
3	Elm Hall	No	0	2,839	(2,839)
4	Grassy Lake	Yes	13,608	12,983	625
5	Pomme de Terre	Yes	7,084	6,434	650
6	Sherburne	Yes	42,690	43,618	(928)
7	Spring Bayou	Yes	12,078	12,506	(428)
8	Thistlewaite	Yes	11,100	11,100	0
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>112,860</b>	<b>119,695</b>	<b>(6,835)</b>
<b>Wildlife Region 7</b>					
1	Hutchinson Creek	No	0	129	(129)
2	Joyce	Yes	15,609	24,708	(9,099)
3	Bens Creek	Yes	13,716	13,044	672
4	Lake Ramsey	No	0	796	(796)
5	Manchac	Yes	8,325	8,328	(3)
6	Maurepas Swamp	No	0	69,812	(69,812)
7	Pearl River	Yes	34,896	35,031	(135)
8	Sandy Hollow	Yes	3,697	3,693	4
9	Tangipahoa Parish School Board	No	0	1,643	(1,643)
10	Tunica Hills	Yes	3,367	5,906	(2,539)
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>79,610</b>	<b>163,090</b>	<b>(83,480)</b>

(Continued)

Appendix A					
Comparison of Acreage Per LDWF Management Plans and Inventory					
Number of Properties	Property	Management Plan?	Acreage Per 1998 Management Plan	Acreage Per December 2007 Inventory	Difference
<b>Fur &amp; Refuge WMAs</b>					
1	Atchafalaya Delta	Yes	137,000	141,912	(4,912)
2	Biloxi	Yes	39,583	39,583	0
3	Lake Beouf	No	0	802	(802)
4	Pass-a-Loutre	No	0	110,491	(110,491)
5	Pointe-aux-Chenes	No	0	32,885	(32,885)
6	Salvador	No	0	30,617	(30,617)
7	Timkin	No	0	2,888	(2,888)
8	Waddill	No	0	233	(233)
9	Wisner	Yes	21,621	15,049	6,572
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>198,204</b>	<b>374,460</b>	<b>(176,256)</b>
<b>Subtotal WMA Acreage</b>		<b>41</b>	<b>1,012,925</b>	<b>1,305,026</b>	<b>(292,101)</b>
<b>Fur &amp; Refuge Refuges</b>					
1	Marsh Island Refuge	Yes	72,986	74,088	(1,102)
2	Rockefeller Refuge	Yes	76,042	76,335	(293)
3	State Wildlife Refuge	Yes	13,000	14,957	(1,957)
4	St. Tammany Refuge	No	N/A	1,075	N/A
5	Terrebonne Barrier Islands Refuge	No	N/A	3,400	N/A
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>162,028</b>	<b>169,855</b>	<b>(7,827)</b>
<b>WMA and Refuge Totals</b>		<b>44</b>	<b>1,174,953</b>	<b>1,474,881</b>	<b>(299,928)</b>

Source: Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information obtained from LDWF.

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Appendix B								
Comparison of Acreage Per LDWF Inventory and SLABS								
Number of Properties	Property	Acreage Per LDWF Inventory April 2007	Acreage Per SLABS Inventory April 2007	Difference	Acreage Per LDWF Inventory December 2007	Acreage Per SLABS Inventory October 2007	Difference	Number of Properties With Differing Acreage
1	Acadiana Conservation Corridor	2,285	2,285	0	2,285	2,285	0	
2	Alexander State Forest <sup>1</sup>	8,158	0	8,158	8,158	0	8,158	1
3	Atchafalaya Delta	141,912	7,800	134,112	141,912	7,800	134,112	2
4	Attakapas	25,730	26,300	(570)	27,930	26,300	1,630	3
5	Bayou Macon	6,919	6,940	(21)	6,919	6,940	(21)	4
6	Bayou Pierre	2,212	2,215	(3)	2,212	2,215	(3)	5
7	Bens Creek	13,044	13,856	(812)	13,044	13,856	(812)	6
8	Big Colewa Bayou	899	373	526	899	373	526	7
9	Big Lake	19,231	19,589	(358)	19,231	19,589	(358)	8
10	Biloxi	39,583	39,583	0	39,583	39,583	0	
11	Bodcau	34,355	33,766	589	34,355	33,766	589	9
12	Boeuf	50,967	50,987	(20)	50,967	50,987	(20)	10
13	Boise Vernon/Clear Creek	55,672	55,042	630	55,672	55,042	630	11
14	Buckhorn	11,264	11,121	143	11,264	11,121	143	12
15	Camp Beaugard	12,500	N/A	N/A	12,500	N/A	N/A	
16	Coulee Game Refuge	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	
17	Dewey Wills	61,871	61,827	44	61,871	61,827	44	13
18	Elbow Slough	160	160	0	160	160	0	
19	Elm Hall	2,839	2,839	0	2,839	2,839	0	
20	Floy McElroy	681	681	0	681	681	0	
21	Fort Polk	105,545	109,855	(4,310)	105,545	109,855	(4,310)	14
22	Grassy Lake	12,983	13,068	(85)	12,983	13,068	(85)	15
23	Hutchinson Creek	129	165	(36)	129	165	(36)	16
24	Terrebonne Barrier Island Refuge	3,400	2,095	1,305	3,400	2,095	1,305	17
25	Jackson-Bienville	32,185	32,372	(187)	32,185	32,372	(187)	18

(Continued)

Appendix B								
Comparison of Acreage Per LDWF Inventory and SLABS								
Number of Properties	Property	Acreage Per LDWF Inventory April 2007	Acreage Per SLABS Inventory April 2007	Difference	Acreage Per LDWF Inventory December 2007	Acreage Per SLABS Inventory October 2007	Difference	Number of Properties With Differing Acreage
26	Joyce	16,394	15,910	484	24,708	15,910	8,798	19
27	Lake Beouf	789	786	3	802	786	16	20
28	Lake Ramsey	796	796	0	796	796	0	
29	Little River	4,799	3,910	889	4,799	3,910	889	21
30	Loggy Bayou	6,382	4,204	2,178	6,382	4,204	2,178	22
31	Manchac	8,328	8,325	3	8,328	8,325	3	23
32	Marsh Bayou	655	663	(8)	655	663	(8)	24
33	Marsh Island Refuge	74,088	75,852	(1,764)	74,088	75,852	(1,764)	25
34	Maurepas Swamp	69,039	61,648	7,391	69,812	61,648	8,164	26
35	NW LA Game and Fish Preserve	N/A	8,475	N/A	N/A	8,475	N/A	
36	Ouachita <sup>2</sup>	9,641	N/A	N/A	10,377	N/A	N/A	
37	Pass-a-Loutre	110,491	66,000	44,491	110,491	66,000	44,491	27
38	Pearl River	35,031	33,012	2,020	35,031	33,012	2,020	28
39	Peason Ridge	33,010	33,488	(478)	33,010	33,488	(478)	29
40	Pointe-aux-Chenes	32,885	33,397	(512)	32,885	33,397	(512)	30
41	Pomme de Terre	6,434	6,434	0	6,434	6,434	0	
42	Red River	41,681	40,030	1,651	41,681	40,030	1,651	31
43	Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge	76,335	85,000	(8,665)	76,335	85,000	(8,665)	32
44	Russell Sage	16,220	28,109	(11,890)	15,920	28,109	(12,189)	33
45	Sabine	13,706	13,472	234	13,706	13,472	234	34
46	Sabine Island	8,695	7,143	1,552	8,695	7,143	1,552	35
47	Salvador	30,617	30,663	(46)	30,617	30,663	(46)	36
48	Sandy Hollow	3,695	3,710	(14)	3,693	3,710	(16)	37
49	Sherburne	43,618	12,267	31,351	43,618	12,267	31,351	38
50	Sicily Island Hills	7,524	5,503	2,021	7,524	5,503	2,021	39

(Continued)

**Appendix B**  
**Comparison of Acreage Per LDWF Inventory and SLABS**

Number of Properties	Property	Acreage Per LDWF Inventory April 2007	Acreage Per SLABS Inventory April 2007	Difference	Acreage Per LDWF Inventory December 2007	Acreage Per SLABS Inventory October 2007	Difference	Number of Properties With Differing Acreage
51	Soda Lake	2,500	2,571	(71)	2,500	2,571	(71)	40
52	Spanish Lake	N/A	1,229	N/A	N/A	1,229	N/A	
53	Spring Bayou	12,506	12,202	304	12,506	12,202	304	41
54	St. Tammany Wildlife Refuge	1,075	1,075	0	1,075	1,075	0	
55	State Wildlife Refuge	14,957	15,135	(178)	14,957	15,135	(178)	42
56	Tangipahoa Parish School Board	1,643	N/A	N/A	1,643	N/A	N/A	
57	Thistlewaite	11,100	11,100	0	11,100	11,100	0	
58	Three Rivers	28,125	27,090	1,035	28,125	27,090	1,035	43
59	Timken WMA	2,888	3,921	(1,033)	2,888	3,921	(1,033)	44
60	Tunica Hills	5,906	5,836	70	5,906	5,836	70	45
61	Union	11,193	12,196	(1,004)	11,193	12,196	(1,004)	46
62	Waddill	233	234	(1)	233	234	(1)	47
63	Walnut Hill	595	595	0	595	595	0	
64	West Bay	60,000	46,720	13,280	60,000	46,720	13,280	48
65	White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area	N/A	71,130	N/A	N/A	71,130	N/A	
66	Wisner	15,049	15,000	49	15,049	15,000	49	49
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,463,147</b>	<b>1,297,749</b>	165,398	<b>1,474,882</b>	<b>1,297,749</b>	177,133	<b>49</b>

**Note:** The information provided by LDWF for the April 2007 inventory was created in February 2006.

**N/A** - This property is not found in the associated inventory.

<sup>1</sup> SLABS reports this property as not owned by LDWF; however, LDWF in conjunction with the owner, Louisiana Department of Agriculture, manages the property.

<sup>2</sup> LDWF lists this property as a separate WMA in its inventory. According to SLABS, this WMA was combined with Russell Sage WMA and is not listed separately.

LDWF reported 62 properties in its inventory. The 66 properties in this table reflect all properties reported by both LDWF and SLABS. Four properties in the table are not included in LDWF's inventory. These properties (Coulee Game Refuge, NW LA Game Fish Preserve, Spanish Lake, and White Lake) are highlighted in green.

SLABS reported 63 properties in its inventory. The 66 total properties in this table reflect all properties reported by both LDWF and SLABS. Three properties in the table are not included in the SLABS inventory. These properties (Camp Beauregard, Ouachita, and Tangipahoa Parish School Board) are highlighted in blue.

**Source:** Prepared by legislative auditor's staff using information obtained from LDWF and SLABS officials.

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**APPENDIX C: MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE**





BOBBY JINDAL  
GOVERNOR

State of Louisiana  
DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES  
OFFICE OF SECRETARY

ROBERT J. BARHAM  
SECRETARY

August 4, 2008

Mr. Steve Theriot, CPA  
Louisiana Legislative Auditor  
1600 North Third Street  
P.O. Box 94397  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804-9397

RE: Performance Audit Report

Dear Mr. Theriot:

I would like to thank you and your staff for the professional manner in which you conducted your performance audit of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries' (LDWF) land management program. We appreciate the opportunity to respond to your findings and offer the following responses to your recommendations:

**Recommendation 1: Once the Attorney General issues a written opinion, LDWF should review it and determine whether properties like the 16 in question should be included in its inventory. If the opinion says that the transfer or lease of property is complete after the LWFC obtains the approval of the governor or his designee (i.e., the LDWF secretary), LDWF should ensure that it includes all such properties in its inventory at that point in the future.**

**DWF Response:** It is our understanding that the Governor may soon sign the 16 referenced proclamations thereby eliminating the need for an Attorney General's opinion. We are currently awaiting that decision.

**Recommendation # 2: LDWF should comply with R.S. 56:109.2(B) by submitting an inventory report to the legislature each fiscal year. The department should retain a copy of the report for review purposes and future reference.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will submit and retain a copy of the required report as specified by state law.

**Recommendation 3: LDWF should evaluate the staffing level of the inventory function and make any adjustments necessary to ensure that it maintains the inventory on a complete and accurate basis.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and have devised a corrective action plan. Rather than using a biologist housed in the wildlife division to perform these duties as is currently done, LDWF will move this position to the legal section. The new position in the legal section will

be filled by a qualified attorney who will handle all land acquisition matters. This attorney will report to the Secretary through the General Counsel.

During the last fiscal year, the land management program spent approximately \$ 81,000 with contract attorneys for land acquisition and related work. We anticipate that the new attorney position will eliminate the need to outsource much of this work.

**Recommendation 4: LDWF should convert its land conveyance documents to an electronic filing system. The department should consider a system that links its inventory to the land conveyance supporting documents and makes the information accessible, in a read-only format, to all individuals responsible for managing the properties.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will research available options. Implementation of a new system will depend heavily on budget constraints.

**Recommendation 5: LDWF should establish formal policies and procedures that implement controls to ensure that the inventory of properties it manages is updated regularly (i.e., at least annually) and maintained on a complete and accurate basis.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will implement formal controls once the new land management position is filled.

**Recommendation 6: LDWF should establish procedures to ensure that all documents related to acreage (e.g., management plans/program narratives, the acreage inventory spreadsheet, etc.) consistently contain accurate acreage figures.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will review documents containing acreage figures for accuracy.

**Recommendation 7: LDWF should work with SLO to either obtain read-only access to SLABS or receive periodic hard copy inventory reports. LDWF should then use that information to help verify its own inventory.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will contact the State Land Office to discuss obtaining access to their system. However, some discrepancies are based on management of leased lands and/or ownership of water bottoms by the state, thus these will always present discrepancies between SLABS and LDWF inventory acres.

**Recommendation 8: LDWF should work with SLO to resolve the land inventory discrepancies cited in this section of the audit report and to ensure that information contained in SLABS relative to properties owned or leased by LDWF is complete, accurate, and current.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will work with the State Land Office to resolve any inaccuracies in their system subject to staffing and budget constraints.

**Recommendation 9: LDWF should resolve the management issues of NW LA Game and Fish Preserve. The department should also resolve the ownership issues of Spanish Lake and determine what its responsibilities are for this property. One option is for LDWF to ask SLO**

**to request more in-depth information from the local clerks of court and then provide copies of the documents it receives to LDWF.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation.

**Recommendation 10: LDWF should develop a single comprehensive management plan for each property under its management responsibility. The plans should include management goals and objectives specific to individual properties.**

**DWF Response:** We partially agree with this recommendation as this is an initiative that we began in 2006. We have developed a comprehensive management plan for the Rockefeller Refuge and are in the process of developing similar plans for all other managed properties. However, the Department owned WMAs under authority of the Wildlife Division are managed under a comprehensive General Forest Management Plan, which is updated (last update in Spring 2007) periodically according to our *adaptive management* practice. Other WMA specific objectives and goals are spelled out in the WMA narratives and will be updated on 10 year frequencies.

**Recommendation 11: LDWF should periodically review all management plans and adjust them for changes in the condition of the land, changes in land use, increased or decreased acreage, advances in scientific practice, and increases or decreases in public usage. The adjustments should include budget, staffing, and other changes necessary to address these issues.**

**DWF Response:** We partially agree with this recommendation. While changes in land condition, land use, acreage, scientific practice and public usage are all beneficial areas to include, budget and staffing are not appropriate areas to include in LDWF management plans.

LDWF does not budget or staff based on individual management areas, but by regions that encompass multiple areas. This allows LDWF to meet the needs of each area by rotating scarce individual staff and financial resources to areas when and where they are needed. We believe that allocating individual budget and staff to each of the 62 properties for which we are responsible would be complicated, burdensome and will not add value or result in any bottom line benefit to the public.

Adjustment for changes in land condition, land use, acreage, scientific practice and public usage occurs through our *adaptive management* of these properties. The continued research associated with our management practices on these properties allows us to adjust our management practices to meet the changing needs of society and wildlife populations associated with these properties.

**Recommendation 12: LDWF should develop and implement strong monitoring and evaluation strategies to ensure that LDWF effectively manages properties in accordance with established management plans and laws.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and would like to note that our staff have been conducting inspections of our properties, but have simply not documented them consistently. We will develop a monitoring plan to ensure that all properties are inspected regularly, that the

results of these inspections are documented and that any issues identified will be followed up on appropriately.

Additionally, a strong long-term monitoring program is established and carried out for all Department owned WMAs, focused on monitoring habitat and forest resource changes over ten year periods as a result of anthropogenic and natural causes.

**Recommendation 13: Since LDWF captures data only for WMAs, the department should develop a means of capturing public utilization data for refuges and similar properties.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation. LDWF will continue to use self clearing permits on areas where practical and will develop alternate strategies such as bag checks and surveys for other areas. It should be noted that LDWF does collect public utilization from Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge via car counters and creel surveys at all entrances to the Refuge.

**Recommendation 14: LDWF should implement a procedure for collecting public utilization data for all activities on all WMAs, refuges and similar properties. The procedure should provide for the use of proven data collection methods applied on a consistent basis for each property.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will develop a formal procedure to ensure consistency to the extent possible / practical. It should be noted that many of the coastal WMAs and refuges are accessible by water only with multiple access points. LDWF currently does not have the staff or financial resources to collect this type of data in these areas. With the multitude of access points at some WMA's such as Pass a Loutre and Atchafalaya Delta, collection of public use data with the exception of some qualitative bag check may be impractical.

**Recommendation 15: LDWF should explore additional methods of capturing public utilization data rather than relying primarily on self-clearing permit information. Two possibilities might be electronic scanning of licenses (using barcodes) and online surveys.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will research alternative methods of capturing public utilization data. However, it should be noted that electronic scanning of licenses may be cost prohibitive and that online surveys in our experience have a lower response rate than self clearing permits. It should also be noted that LDWF does use other of methods for collecting public utilization data such as car counts, bag checks and creel counts.

**Recommendation 16: If LDWF continues to use self-clearing permits to capture public utilization data, it should implement controls to ensure that the data are complete and reliable. Such controls might include reviewing data entered into electronic spreadsheets to ensure that they were entered properly, retaining completed self-clearing permits so they can be used to verify information in spreadsheets and conducting head counts, car counts, and bag checks of users on properties the department manages in a consistent manner.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and plan to continue the use of self clearing permits. We will implement controls to ensure review of data, retention of original permits, periodic head counts, car counts and bag checks where applicable.

**Recommendation 17: If LDWF continues using self-clearing permits, it should also ensure that the public receives complete, easy-to-understand, easy-to-access, and consistent information on the self-clearing permit requirements for each property it manages. In addition, the department should implement controls to ensure that the public complies with the self-clearing permit requirements established by the Office of Wildlife. Such controls might include providing the public with readily available information that is easy to follow.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will revise material provided to the public to ensure consistency and ease of use.

**Recommendation 18: Once LDWF implements a more effective system of capturing public utilization data, management should use the data to make sound decisions related to public use of lands, land acquisition, and other related issues.**

**DWF Response:** We partially agree with this recommendation. Public utilization data has been used for decision making purposes in an informal manner. Going forward, LDWF will endeavor to formalize the use of this data for land management decisions.

**Recommendation 19: LDWF should resolve the problems associated with its Web site that are cited in this section of the audit report. The Web site should prominently display, throughout the year, a list of all activities permitted on each property the department manages as well as all requirements for using each property in an easy-to navigate fashion.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and are working to resolve this issue.

**Recommendation 20: LDWF should enhance its Web site to promote public usage of state managed lands. For example, the department should make the Web site more appealing to specific, targeted markets it identifies as potential users of the properties it manages, such as teenagers and retirees.**

**DWF Response:** We partially agree with this recommendation. While an enhanced web site would be extremely valuable to the public, we believe that it should target audiences based on activities (such as fishing, hunting, bird watching, etc.) vs. demographic groups such as teenagers and retirees. However, some experimental demographic focus may be tested for response.

**Recommendation 21: LDWF should evaluate the staffing level(s) of the land acquisition program and make any necessary adjustments.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation. See our response to recommendation # 3 for our corrective action plan.

**Recommendation 22: LDWF should design and implement a comprehensive land acquisition process including criteria for staff to follow to ensure that projects meet the established goals and objectives of the program.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will work with our land management attorney, once hired, to implement formal processes and criteria.

**Recommendation 23: LDWF should implement strong documentation procedures for property acquisitions such as checklists or other forms of documentation. The department should also establish prioritization schedules to ensure that properties most in line with its goals and mission are acquired first.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will work with our land management attorney, once hired, to formalize selection criteria and processes.

**Recommendation 24: LDWF should develop goals, objectives, and criteria for its land acquisition program that meet the mission of the department. The department should amend its strategic plan to include those goals and objectives.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and will develop specific written goals, objectives and criteria and will include this in our strategic plan as suggested.

**Recommendation 25: The LWFC chair and department secretary should require adequate documentation and analysis from LDWF staff when considering land acquisitions to ensure that potential acquisitions are in line with established goals and objectives.**

**DWF Response:** We agree with this recommendation and would like to add some clarifying information. When making land acquisition decisions the LWFC Chair and Secretary do receive documentation and analysis from staff. However this is not always consistent and formalized as part of the official record. Going forward, we will develop and implement a written checklist to ensure compliance with R.S. 56:1922 and to ensure that acquisitions are in line with established goals and objectives.

We would like to commend your staff for the professionalism and cooperation they exhibited during this engagement. Thank you for your assistance, and if you should have any questions or need additional information please contact me at 765-2860.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Barham  
Secretary

c: Janice Lansing, Undersecretary  
Jimmy Anthony, Assistant Secretary  
Don Puckett, General Counsel  
Jeff LaCour, Internal Auditor