

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility News Release (www.peer.org)

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ONE-THIRD OF WILDLIFE REFUGES USE GM CROPS IN SOUTHEAST — Genetically Modified Seeds Okayed by Obama Fish & Wildlife Service Director Pick Hamilton

Washington, DC — One-third of National Wildlife Refuges in the Southeast U.S. are growing genetically modified crops with approval from the official tapped by the Obama White House to head the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, according to agency records obtained today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). Planting GM crops on a wildlife refuge is illegal without full prior environmental and public review under a federal court ruling won by PEER and allied groups last year, but none of the Southeastern refuges have undertaken the required reviews.

National wildlife refuges have allowed farming for decades in order to help prepare seed beds for native habitat such as grasslands and provide food for migratory birds and other wildlife. In recent years, refuge farming programs are being converted to GM crops because that is the seed that farmers can obtain or, in some case, prefer. Today, almost all the crops being grown on refuges are genetically modified.

By law and policy, these refuges are supposed to be administered to benefit wildlife, not local farmers. In fact, Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) policy explicitly forbids “genetically modified agricultural crops in refuge management unless we determine their use is essential to accomplishing refuge purpose(s)”. By contrast to this policy, in the Southeast Region, headed by Sam Hamilton, named by the Obama administration as its intended nominee to lead the entire FWS, records show –

- One in three (41 of 128 total refuges) are growing GM crops;
- No refuge has been denied permission for GM crops; and
- The basis for Hamilton’s Regional Office approval typically cites farmers’ profitability or their preference for GM crops.

“What is supposed to be a last resort exception has become common practice,” stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, who obtained copies of all GM crop approvals from the FWS under the Freedom of Information Act. “Sam Hamilton seems to embrace genetically engineered refuge management with open arms.”

Earlier this year in a lawsuit brought by PEER and other groups, a federal court ordered FWS to stop planting GM crops on its Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge in Delaware. The court found that FWS had illegally entered into Cooperative Farming Agreements without doing compatibility determinations required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act and environmental assessments required by the National Environmental Policy Act. While the ruling was limited to one refuge, its legal rationale applies to every refuge across the country.

The records obtained by PEER indicated that refuges in Hamilton’s region had not done the legally required reviews. “The next Director of the Fish & Wildlife Service should have demonstrated both the ability and willingness to follow the very laws that the agency is supposed to administer,” Ruch added. “Sam Hamilton’s record strongly suggests business as usual will continue at the Fish & Wildlife Service.”

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[See the list of SE refuges growing GM crops](#)

[Look at the spread of GM crops across the National Wildlife Refuge System](#)

[View U.S. District Court ruling on PEER lawsuit barring GM crops on Prime Hook NWR](#)

[Examine Sam Hamilton's record](#)

[Read some of the Southeast Region approvals for GM crops](#)