UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

★ news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

For Release August 16, 1967 Most 343-5634

ST. VINCENT ISLAND, FLORIDA, TO BECOME FEDERAL REFUGE WITH ASSIST FROM PRIVATE DONORS

St. Vincent Island, a 12,000-acre natural complex of marshes, palm-lined beaches, and sub-tropical forests off the coast of Florida's panhandle, has been approved for addition to the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall, in announcing the planned acquisition, said, "Federal ownership of St. Vincent will be possible through private donors' contributions of $200,000 to the Nature Conservancy and far-sighted action by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission which approved the use of Federal funds. The island is certainly one of the most valuable additions that could be made to the wildlife refuge system."

The island was purchased in 1948 by the St. Vincent Island Company, a co-partnership of Alfred L. and Henry Loomis, and their wives. The island has been maintained since as a family recreation area. The Loomis family was concerned that the land and its natural values might be destroyed if sold to private interests and agreed that the island should be sold for refuge purposes.

However, an appraisal by Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife was less than the $2.2 million asking price, and several philanthropic sources, including Laurance Rockefeller of New York, volunteered to make up the difference by donations to Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy agreed to buy St. Vincent Island and serve as a "holding company" until Federal funds become available after July 1, 1968.

The State of Florida also offered to contribute any non-Federal funds which might be needed in addition to the Nature Conservancy donation.

"Because of the unique character of this island, the Smithsonian Institution has indicated an interest in carrying out part of its field program of ecological studies on St. Vincent," Udall said.

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