

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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GREAT DISMAL SWAMP STUDY IS UNDERWAY

A study of the resource and recreational values of the Great Dismal Swamp and the Dismal Swamp Canal in Virginia-North Carolina is now underway, according to Assistant Secretary Nathaniel P. Reed, who heads the Interior Department's programs for fish, wildlife, parks, and outdoor recreation.

Reed said that a meeting will be held in Washington on August 2 to orient interested national conservation group representatives to the study. The meeting will be held in Room 4417 of the Interior Building at 1 p.m. Invitations have been sent out; others wishing to attend may make reservations by contacting Dick Eichhorn, Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Wildlife Refuges, telephone 202/343-2691.

Reed said the study is to determine the desirability and feasibility of protecting and preserving the ecological, scenic, recreational, historical and other resource values of the Swamp and Canal, with particular emphasis on the development of the Canal for recreational boating purposes.

Effectiveness and costs of alternative means for preserving the Swamp also are to be studied, as well as the types of Federal, State, or local programs, if any, that are feasible and desirable and in the public interest for preserving, developing and making accessible the numerous values associated with the Swamp.

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Under Public Law 92-478, the Secretary of the Interior is directed to consider potential alternative beneficial and appropriate uses of the water and related land resources for residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and transportation purposes and for other public services.

The remaining viable portion of the Great Dismal Swamp already has been identified during the study. Approximately 210,000 acres between Chesapeake, Virginia, and Elizabeth City, North Carolina, comprise the study area, which is almost equally divided between the two States.

The study area in Virginia is located within the Cities of Chesapeake and Nansemond. The North Carolina study area includes portions of Currituck, Camden, Gates, Perquimans, and Pasquotank Counties. Involved Federal areas include the 22-mile Dismal Swamp Canal which runs from Deep Creek, Virginia, to South Mills, North Carolina, operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, about 49,000 acres, located in Virginia.

The refuge was donated by the Union Camp Corporation through the Nature Conservancy to the Department of the Interior for management by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System. This large-scale donation by Union Camp, valued at \$12.6 million, is one of the most noteworthy preservation efforts ever made in the United States by a private concern, Reed said. Other conservation-minded land holders in the Swamp will be encouraged to consider similar donations to insure preservation of an outstanding and unique ecological area, Reed added.

He emphasized that hydrological studies outside of the formal study area will be necessary to account for exterior influences on the Swamp and vice-versa. Examples include drainages into the Swamp, as well as surface and sub-surface flows from the Swamp.

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The Dismal Swamp Study is being coordinated for the Secretary of the Interior through the Northeast Regional Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; eight Federal agencies will participate in the investigation.

Within the Department of the Interior, participating agencies and their roles are: Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (recreation potential and demand), U.S. Geological Survey (water dynamics and mineral data), National Park Service (historical and cultural study), and the Fish and Wildlife Service (wildlife data, preparation of ownership information, and other social, economic, and public management data, as well as determining the ultimate boundaries of the Dismal Swamp Refuge).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Soil Conservation Service and the Forest Service, will provide information on soils and agricultural uses and present and potential forest management benefits. The U.S. Department of Transportation will work on potential public transportation requirements. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will provide operation and management data with respect to the Dismal Swamp Canal and appurtenances.

State, county, and local governments, organized public interest groups, and applicable private companies are to be contacted by letter within the next four weeks and asked for comments regarding present and anticipated uses of land and water within the designated study area. Interested parties not receiving a letter may express their interest in the future preservation or management of the Great Dismal Swamp and the Dismal Swamp Canal by corresponding to: Robert H. Shields, Dismal Swamp Study Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, John W. McCormack Post Office and Courthouse, Boston, Massachusetts 02109.

Assistant Secretary Reed said that tentative recommendations will be released after all Federal studies have been completed and after receipt and consideration of proposals from interested parties. Public hearings, if warranted, will be held in Virginia and North Carolina during June 1974. The final report will be completed in August-September 1974, in order to meet the October 9, 1974, deadline for submission of the Secretary's recommendations to Congress.

The Great Dismal Swamp is a vast, unusual geological phenomenon straddling the eastern border of Virginia and North Carolina. Estimates on the size of the original Swamp have exceeded one million acres. Despite the efforts of man, at least 210,000 acres of the original Swamp remain relatively intact, although criss-crossed in a diverse pattern with various ditches, roads, and waterways.

The Swamp is recognized as a complex wilderness environment of water, plants and wildlife. While designated a swamp, the actual character of the Swamp is best described as a timbered bog. The only discernible surface water normally observed is limited to the two and one-half mile diameter area of Lake Drummond, located in the heart of the Swamp, and in various man-made ditches and canals.