

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT ISSUED ON PROPOSED WILDLIFE REFUGE IN CANAAN VALLEY, WEST VIRGINIA

A final environmental impact statement on a proposal to establish West Virginia's first national wildlife refuge--in part of Canaan Valley--has been issued by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Under the proposal, the Service would acquire approximately 28,000 acres of unimproved wetlands and uplands in Canaan Valley to protect and preserve a unique boreal (northern) ecosystem. The valley contains the largest wetland complex in West Virginia, representing about 39 percent of the State's total wetland habitat. As many as 286 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fishes are known or expected to occur in the area. If established, the refuge would offer the public opportunities for a broad range of wildlife-oriented recreation, including environmental education and interpretation.

The final environmental impact statement will be used as the basis for any decisions made by the Service on the refuge proposal. No decision on whether to establish the refuge has yet been made.

Copies of the final environmental impact statement may be obtained by writing to Mr. Howard N. Larsen, Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, One Gateway Center, Suite 700, Newton Corner, Massachusetts 02158.

Canaan Valley is about 3 miles east of Davis in Tucker County, West Virginia. The valley runs from southwest to northeast and is about 13½ miles long. The 3,200-foot elevation, combined with the cool moist conditions of the mid-Alleghenies, has produced a unique group of sub-alpine habitats. The unusual conditions have allowed ice-age plant and animal communities to flourish and remain into modern times.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, logging and fires changed much of the habitat from dense spruce forests and rhododendron thickets to a complex mosaic of wetlands, beaver ponds, forests, grasslands, and shrub lands. The result is an area of great natural beauty that supports a variety of wildlife species. In 1974, the Secretary of the Interior designated Canaan Valley as a National Natural Landmark.

Currently, land use within the valley centers around recreation, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and skiing, with some agriculture. Development, including construction of homes and recreational complexes, has been increasing. Construction of a pumped storage hydroelectric power project in Canaan Valley has been proposed by Allegheny Power Systems, Inc. The status of the project has yet to be resolved because of two unsettled court cases over possible environmental damage from the project.