

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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CURRITUCK OUTER BANKS, NORTH CAROLINA, TO BE PROPOSED AS A NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus today recommended the establishment of a 15,880-acre national wildlife refuge on the Currituck Outer Banks of North Carolina.

"One of the deep interests of this Administration has been the preservation of our coastlines and barrier islands," Andrus said. "These areas are under increasing pressure for development in spite of the fact that many are unstable and vulnerable to severe storms that destroy property and threaten human lives. It is appropriate that the Currituck Outer Banks, which is so valuable to wildlife and fisheries, be preserved as a national wildlife refuge that all Americans can use and enjoy."

Andrus emphasized that his recommendation, based on a proposal by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, does not constitute final action. Before the Fish and Wildlife Service can begin acquisition of property, Congress will have to approve establishment of the refuge and appropriate the necessary funds. The estimated cost of the acquisition is \$94,050,000.

The Currituck Sound area supports one of the largest wintering waterfowl concentrations on the East Coast, containing about 6 percent of the Atlantic Flyway's ducks and geese, and provides habitat for osprey, least terns, herons, and many other birds. Endangered and threatened species, including the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and loggerhead turtle, use the area for feeding or nesting. The area is also an important migration route for raptors and supports an excellent largemouth bass fishery.

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The proposed refuge would include all lands north of the village of Corolla, North Carolina, to the Virginia State line, and all wetlands in Currituck Sound south of Corolla to the Dare County line. The action would involve 15,880 acres of beach and marsh lands, including 157 improvements and 3,211 platted lots. If Congress authorizes the acquisition, the Fish and Wildlife Service will purchase the affected uplands and will purchase or take conservation easements on the wetlands. In some areas, long-term use reservations (agreements that allow landowners to continue to use and occupy their property) will be allowed.

The decision to recommend establishment of the refuge followed intensive studies of the area by the Fish and Wildlife Service; extensive consultation with Federal, State, and local officials and local civic groups and business interests; and a lengthy period of public comment. Following announcement of the proposal and preliminary public hearings, a draft environmental impact statement on the refuge proposal was published in early January 1980. Comments on the draft were received and public hearings were held in Raleigh, North Carolina; Currituck, North Carolina; and Arlington, Virginia. A final environmental impact statement was issued on September 3, 1980, and public comments on this report were accepted through November 14. Of approximately 200 comments received on the final report, about two-thirds supported some form of Federal acquisition and one-third opposed any type of acquisition by the Federal Government.

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