



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Release: May 1, 1990

STEVE GOLDSTEIN (O) (202) 208-6416
(H) (202) 887-5248

INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN ANNOUNCES CREATION OF NATION'S NEWEST URBAN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan today marked creation of the Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge in a ceremony held in New Orleans, Louisiana.

"Establishment of this new refuge will greatly enhance efforts to bring the story of wildlife conservation and management to thousands of visitors each year. Plans for the new refuge include creation of an exemplary environmental education center and other interpretive facilities," Lujan noted after signing the agreement.

Today's ceremony marked the culmination of a 3-year effort by Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire the 18,000 acres located in eastern New Orleans from a Merrill Lynch subsidiary, South Point, Inc. Establishment of the refuge was authorized by the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, which directed the acquisition be made within 4 years.

The Interior Department's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Scott Sewell, said, "The Bayou Sauvage refuge joins the ranks of other valuable refuges located adjacent to large urban areas such as the San Francisco Bay refuge, and Tinicum refuge near Philadelphia. These urban refuges enable us to reach visitors, many of whom might otherwise never see a national wildlife refuge and be exposed to the story of wildlife conservation."

(more)

Sewell, a native of New Orleans, noted that the new refuge would help meet President Bush's goal of "no overall net loss of wetlands" and "exemplifies the President's stated policy of creating more protected natural areas close to major urban centers to help improve the quality of life for city residents."

The new refuge consists primarily of pristine freshwater and brackish marshlands heavily populated with fish, alligators, nutria, otters, rabbits, and a diversity of other wildlife. Great blue herons and snowy egrets are found in the refuge's two major rookeries containing approximately 1,500 nests. In addition, waterfowl, including some 90,000 ducks and coots, use the refuge as a wintering site. Service plans include working with the City of New Orleans and the Corps of Engineers to improve water management within the refuge to benefit migratory birds, whose numbers in North America have fallen to critical levels since the 1970's.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Director John Turner said, "Acquisition of these vital wetland areas located less than 10 miles from downtown New Orleans is a significant step forward in Louisiana, a state hard hit by wetlands loss. Louisiana has 40 percent of the Nation's remaining coastal wetland acreage, but experiences up to 80 percent of the national average loss for this wetland type."

The Service paid South Point \$7.75 million for the land bounded by Interstate 10 on the north, by Lake Pontchartrain on the east, by Lake Borgne on the south, and the Maxent Canal on the west. As part of the sale, South Point agreed to contribute \$450,000 toward repair of a failing levee along the western boundary of the property. The money will be added to \$3.68 million appropriated by the U.S. Congress for the repair.