



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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LAND EXCHANGE ADDS VITAL BOTTOMLAND HABITAT TO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

At a January 12th ceremony in Little Rock, Arkansas, officials representing the Interior Department and the Potlatch Corporation of San Francisco signed a land exchange agreement that will add an extensive tract of vital bottomland hardwood wetlands to the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Nearly 41,000 acres of bottomland hardwoods -- considered nature's most productive type of wildlife habitat -- will be added to two existing National Wildlife Refuges along the White River in Arkansas.

The exchange was authorized under legislation proposed by the Department of the Interior and signed into law by President Bush on November 2, 1992. Under the exchange, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service receives the bottomland hardwood acreage between the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge and the White River National Wildlife Refuge.

In return for the Arkansas land, Potlatch receives 17,625 acres of Federal land owned by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management in Idaho. These lands, which Potlatch is to manage for a sustained-yield timber harvest, do not have significant wildlife or wetland values. Much of the land is in

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scattered pockets within larger blocks of mixed Federal and private ownership, making management difficult.

"The exchange is a good deal for everyone, and reflects the most sensible use for all the lands involved," said Mike Hayden, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

As part of the legislation, Potlatch transfers 1,170 acres it holds in Idaho to the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Of this land, 279 acres goes to the Bureau of Land Management to provide public access for recreation in the Lolo Creek Management Area. Another 891 acres transfers to the U.S. Forest Service, 680 acres as an addition to the Grandmother Mountain Wilderness Study area, and 211 acres for public recreation.

"The value of the bottomland hardwood wetlands we receive under this exchange cannot be overestimated," said John Turner, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "This is extremely productive habitat, supporting many times more wildlife species than neighboring uplands. Furthermore, once bottomland hardwoods are destroyed, they are the hardest type of wetland to restore."

The new land will be added to the Cache River and White River National Wildlife Refuges, allowing the Service to manage a total of more than 170,000 acres of wetlands habitat for wildlife.

The Arkansas land consists of largely undisturbed oxbows, lakes, and riverine areas that flood early and consistently, even in dry years, providing excellent -- and reliable -- waterfowl habitat. An estimated 10 percent of the entire mallard population in the Nation's Central Flyway winters on these lands.

Existing federal and state wetlands in the area have already been designated as Wetlands of International Importance under the RAMSAR Convention, an international agreement to protect wetlands considered to be of global importance. It is anticipated the newly acquired wetlands will also receive this designation once the exchange is completed.

The Service is to prepare a comprehensive management plan for the two existing refuges and the new land within the next two years. During that time, hunting on the acquired Potlatch lands will continue under state seasons and bag limits.