



# NEWS RELEASE

*from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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## COMMISSION APPROVES HABITAT ACQUISITIONS AT 10 NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES AND 7 WETLANDS CONSERVATION GRANTS

The National Wildlife Refuge System grew by 10,502 acres this month as the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission approved acquisitions of migratory bird habitat at 10 refuges in 6 states at its June 25, 1996, meeting at the Department of the Interior. It also approved \$1.8 million in grants for five wetlands conservation projects in Mexico and two in the United States, which were matched by \$4.5 million from other agency and individual partners.

The Cabinet-Congressional level commission, chaired by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, must approve all new refuge lands acquired with monies from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund. It also gives final approval to grants from the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund.

The following acquisitions were approved for the National Wildlife Refuge System: **Arkansas**--Cache River (2,417 acres) and White River National Wildlife Refuges (478 acres); **Louisiana**--Catahoula NWR (772 acres); **Maryland**--Blackwater NWR (1,188 acres); **Mississippi**--Hillside NWR, (36 acres) and Morgan Brake NWR (74 acres); **New Jersey**--Cape May NWR (89 acres), Edwin B. Forsythe NWR (133 acres), and Wallkill NWR (406 acres); and **North Carolina**--Roanoke River NWR (4,881 acres). The Commission also approved a land exchange at the Arapaho NWR in Colorado with the Bureau of Land Management to complete the final stages of a partnership project between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited, and BLM.

Monies from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund come from the sale of Duck Stamps and other related funding sources, which collectively have been used to acquire 4.4 million acres for the National Wildlife Refuge System since 1934. Coincidentally, the new Duck Stamp for the 1996-97 season was unveiled June 27 at the opening of the new Federal Duck Stamp exhibit, "Artistic License: The Duck Stamp Story," at the Smithsonian's Institutions's National Postal Museum. The stamp goes on sale July 1 at most post offices, national wildlife refuges, and other locations and can be used as a pass to national wildlife refuges that charge entry fees.

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Monies for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund come from appropriations, interest, and other wildlife-related accounts and require a 1:1 non-federal match. Five grants in Mexico of \$296,000 were matched by \$455,000 from partners for wetlands conservation projects in the Gulf of California, Baja California, Nayarit, Yucatan, and Guanajuato.

Grants in the U.S. were approved for the Minnesota River Watershed Restoration Project, Phase 2, for \$1.09 million, matched by \$3.3 million from partners; and in Texas for the I-45 Scenic Estuarial Corridor Acquisition and Restoration Project for \$400,000, with a \$775,350 match.

In addition to Secretary Babbitt, other members of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission include Senator John Breaux of Louisiana, who replaced retiring Senator David Pryor of Arkansas; Senator Thad Cochran of Mississippi; Representatives John Dingell of Michigan and Curt Weldon of Pennsylvania; Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol Browner.

The National Wildlife Refuge System, founded in 1903 by President Theodore Roosevelt, now includes 508 refuges in all 50 states and encompasses 92.3 million acres. It is the world's most outstanding network of lands and waters dedicated to wildlife.