

Wild

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PRIME WATERFOWL HABITAT ADDED TO THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM; WETLANDS CONSERVATION PROJECTS LAUNCHED

Nearly 3,000 acres recently were targeted for acquisition for the National Wildlife Refuge System and 22 North American Wetlands Conservation Fund projects were launched in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, upon the approval of a cabinet-congressional commission chaired by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt.

At its summer meeting, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission approved \$12 million from special funds set up for migratory bird habitat conservation for efforts affecting a total of 1.3 million acres. This includes:

- ▶ \$1.5 million for acquisitions for national wildlife refuges totaling 2,800 acres in seven states: Arkansas, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Utah;
- ▶ \$2.6 million for wetlands conservation projects in California, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, and Virginia, affecting more than 32,000 acres of wetlands. This money will be matched with \$5.5 million from project partners;
- ▶ \$7.6 million for 13 projects affecting 188,000 acres in Canada, with partners contributing another \$9.8 million; and
- ▶ \$276,000 for four projects affecting 890,000 acres in Mexico, with partners contributing \$330,000.

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AMERICA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES...
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New National Wildlife Refuge System Acquisitions:

Cache River National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas will acquire 40 acres of bottomland hardwoods hosting abundant wintering waterfowl, particularly mallards and wood ducks. This acquisition adds to the refuge another part of the largest remaining expanse of forested wetlands on any tributary within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley.

At **Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Maine**, established to preserve ten important estuaries, 13 acres of tidal saltmeadow grass, cordgrass, and blackgrass marsh will be acquired. The area provides a critical wintering area for black ducks, mallards, and green-winged teal, while red-breasted and common mergansers and buffleheads use the area during other seasons. It also supports shore- and waterbirds, including great blue herons and snowy egrets.

Black ducks, wood ducks, goldeneye, and hooded mergansers are among the waterfowl to benefit from wetlands purchased for the **Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge on the Maine-New Hampshire border**, comprising what many consider some of the finest wildlife habitat in the two states. About 200 acres will be acquired, some along the Dead Cambridge and Swift Cambridge Rivers, including forested wetlands and backwater areas especially important to nesting waterfowl.

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey, one of the largest bird hotspots in the United States with literally millions of birds migrating through the Cape May peninsula each year, will purchase 125 acres of saltmarsh and wooded wetlands. These areas will benefit black ducks, wood ducks, and migrating songbirds.

About 225 acres of previously drained wetlands will be restored for the **Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge in New York**, which hosts tens of thousands of geese and ducks year-round, especially Canada geese, mallards, black ducks, canvasbacks, lesser scaup, and ring-necked ducks. The land will be managed cooperatively with farmers for the benefit of wildlife.

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Currituck National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina will expand by more than 2,200 acres of marsh and interdunal wetlands on the state's famous Outer Banks. This land provides breeding, stopover, and wintering habitat for waterfowl, especially black ducks, mallards, and wood ducks.

Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in Utah will acquire a 39-acre tract containing a mix of grassy uplands and shallow wetlands. The tract makes up excellent feeding areas for early arriving migrants, especially dabbling ducks, and stopover spots for waterfowl on their fall migration. In addition, white-faced ibis use the area in the spring, while a variety of shorebirds stay through spring and summer.

New North American Wetlands Conservation Fund Projects:

Using the \$1 million approved by the commission and \$1.9 million of their own contributions, partners will enhance 26,000 acres of Suisun Marsh in **Solano County, California**. This project will benefit 30 species of waterfowl; fisheries such as salmon, splittail, and smelt; several endangered species, and others that would likely reach that status without conservation efforts. In addition to private landowners, partners include the California Department of Fish and Game, Suisun Resource Conservation District, and Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

In **Bibb and Twiggs Counties, Georgia**, partners will use the \$1 million approved by the commission and another \$1.7 million of their monies for the Ocmulgee Greenway-Rivercare 2000 Project, comprising nearly 1,200 acres and establishing a continuous greenway along Ocmulgee River through Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuge to Warner Robins Air Force Base. The riverine areas, swamps, forests, and bottomland hardwoods, interspersed with creeks and oxbow lakes, support songbirds and waterbirds as well as bald eagles, alligators, and prime fisheries. Partners are the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Trust for Public Land.

Restoration of Grass Lake in **Kandiyohi County, Minnesota**, is the goal of the Grass Lake Prairie Wetland Project approved by the commission for \$215,000

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and matched by \$265,000 from project partners. The Kandiyohi Soil and Water Conservation District and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources will acquire conservation easements on 466 wetland and upland acres of the Grass Lake Basin from participating landowners. Grass Lake provides habitat for 24 species of waterfowl, including blue- and green-winged teal, shoveler, gadwall, and ruddy ducks, as well as shore- and waterbirds like the Clark's grebe, black tern, and American pelican.

Forty counties in Michigan will benefit from restoration of 1,750 acres of wetlands and uplands approved by the commission. About 225 wetland basins averaging 1-3 acres will be restored, as will surrounding upland habitat, and coordinated land management assistance will be provided by various partner agencies. Restoration will benefit waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, and endangered wildlife. Partners include the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts; Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; Pheasants Forever; Wetlands Foundation of West Michigan; Michigan Department of Agriculture; Michigan United Conservation Clubs; and private landowners, who matched a total of \$164,000 to the \$105,000 the commission approved for the project. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Natural Resources Conservation Service added non-matching funds.

The \$250,000 the commission approved for the Dutch Gap Conservation Area Project will acquire 810 acres of wetlands and uplands along the James River in **Chesterfield County, Virginia** to be managed by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. In addition to waterfowl, the area supports bald eagles, shorebirds, songbirds, great blue heron rookeries, and recreational fisheries. The project area will be open to fishing, hunting, birdwatching, and environmental education. Nearly \$1.4 million will be contributed by project partners, including Tarmac Industries, Virginia Electric Power Company, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Moncure Duncan Real Estate, and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

FACTS *from the National Wildlife Refuge System*

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission

With passage of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act in 1929, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission was established to approve land acquisitions for the National Wildlife Refuge System that are considered important to waterfowl.

Since its inception, the commission has approved more than 4.5 million-acres-worth of land acquisitions for the 92-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, the only network of federal lands dedicated to wildlife.

The commission's responsibilities increased significantly upon passage of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989, which provides funding to encourage partnerships to protect, enhance, and restore wetlands and other habitats for migratory birds and wildlife in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Since the wetlands conservation program's inception, the commission has approved more than \$205 million toward projects benefitting migratory birds and other wildlife, with an additional \$420 million provided by project partners, affecting more than 3.3 million acres in the United States and Canada. These funds also have been used in Mexico for its community education, management, and training programs affecting nearly 21 million acres in biosphere reserves.

The commission meets three times each year to review proposals for refuge acquisitions and wetlands conservation projects. Refuge acquisitions are financed by the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, including revenue collected from Federal Duck Stamp sales to hunters, stamp collectors, and other conservationists; appropriations; import duties collected on arms and ammunition; and receipts from national wildlife refuge entrance fees.

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Wetlands conservation projects are financed by the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, made up of appropriations; fines, penalties, and forfeitures under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act; and interest accrued on another fund the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers.

Members of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission are the Secretary of the Interior, who serves as chairman; two members of the U.S. Senate (John Breaux and Thad Cochran); two members of the U.S. House of Representatives (John Dingell and Curt Weldon); the Secretary of Agriculture; and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The commission was established largely in response to public concern over plummeting waterfowl populations during the "Dust Bowl" days of the 1920s and '30s, reflecting the National Wildlife Refuge System's early commitment to waterfowl protection. Many national wildlife refuges acquired with Migratory Bird Conservation Fund monies are located along the four major waterfowl "flyways," serving as vital stepping stones for birds on their long annual migrations.

While its importance to waterfowl remains, the Refuge System today hosts a variety of habitats supporting all kinds of wildlife, including many of the nation's endangered species, big game animals like buffalo and elk, prairie wildflowers and cypress forests, trophy trout and tiny butterflies.

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the 94-year-old National Wildlife Refuge System is now made up of 511 refuges and 38 wetland management districts in all 50 states and U.S. territories. More than 30 million people annually visit refuges for a variety of recreational activities, such as birdwatching, fishing, hunting, and nature photography, while hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren visit refuges each year to learn about nature and the environment.