

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



News Release

Midwest Region

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Secretary of the Interior Kempthorne Announces Historic Addition for Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge in Northwest Minnesota

As part of a suite of wetlands acquisitions and conservation grant approvals, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission approved \$4 million to purchase more than 18,000 acres of prairie wetland and associated grassland habitat for the Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge in northwestern Minnesota – one of the largest purchases in history using dollars generated from Federal Duck Stamp sales and import duties on firearms and ammunition.

The Commission – comprised of members of Congress and federal cabinet secretaries – authorized the Minnesota purchase along with an additional three thousand acres of waterfowl habitat for the National Wildlife Refuge System in Oregon, North Carolina and Maine.

The acquisition of the 18,118 acres for the Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge in Polk County, Minnesota will provide important wetland and grassland habitat for mallards, northern pintails, blue-winged teal, tundra swans, sandhill cranes, prairie chickens and many other waterfowl and grassland bird species.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Regional Director Robyn Thorson thanked members of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, Chaired by Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne and including Senators Cochran and Lincoln, Representatives Dingell and Gilchrest, Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen L. Johnson for their support.

“I am proud that the prestigious MBCC, which addresses North America's top migratory bird priorities, recognized the significant role of prairies in waterfowl and wetland conservation,” said Thorson. “This is the largest Commission authorization in decades and it rewards a remarkable partnership with the Polk County Board of Commissioners, The Nature Conservancy and many others who were tireless in crafting a bold plan for Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge.”

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The Commission also approved more than \$24 million in federal funding to protect, restore, enhance and manage more than 107,000 acres of wetlands and associated habitats in Canada, Mexico and the U.S. under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). The grants are funded by annual Congressional appropriations; fines, penalties and forfeitures levied under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act; interest accrued on funds under the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act; and excise taxes paid on small engine fuels through the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Fund.

Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge Manager Dave Bennett is excited about the opportunity this authorization brings to the area. “This action by the Commission helps solidify the efforts of more than 30 organizations and agencies who partnered to help the recovery of the tallgrass prairie, the most imperiled ecosystem in North America,” said Bennett. “This will insure that restored tallgrass prairie habitats will be managed for future generations to enjoy and appreciate”

Thorson, who oversees the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service operations in eight Midwest states, echoed support for the future legacy but also linked it with the past. “As a Federal official,” she stated, “conserving the natural resource heritage of Polk County is a great event in my career. As a grand-daughter of an immigrant Polk County farmer, it is a great event in my life.”

Bennett also mentioned the value this action and the refuge will bring to the local community. “We’ll be working with local officials, residents and other partners to develop public use plans designed to protect wildlife habitat while also supporting Polk County tourism. Those of us who are privileged to live and work here have long understood the globally significant wildlife habitat this area supports,” said Bennett. “I’m thankful for the Commission’s reinforcement of those values and I hope that the significance of this action will encourage many people to visit Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge and see what all the excitement is about.”

Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, part of the 96-million acre National Wildlife Refuge System, is open for wildlife-dependent public use opportunities such as wildlife observation, hunting, photography and more. For more information on Midwest Region National Wildlife Refuges visit: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/Refuges/>

More information about NAWCA grant programs and summaries of the projects approved today is available on the Web at: <http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Grants/NAWCA/index.shtm>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>.