

News Release

National Wildlife Refuge System



Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

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Upper Miss Refuge Reaches 85th Anniversary

Like many great conservation stories, it began with an idea.

Wil Dilg, the Chicago advertising executive, avid river angler, and founder of the Izaak Walton League, wondered if a scenic and yet unspoiled 300-mile stretch of the Upper Mississippi River couldn't be made into a federal preserve for fish and wildlife.

Remarkably, after a year of Dilg's lobbying in Washington, D.C., his idea came true.

On June 7, 1924, the Act of Congress creating the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge was signed by President Calvin Coolidge.

Eighty-five years later, the idea and dream still lives, and the 240,000-acre refuge winding through four states for 261 miles provides a home for hundreds of species of birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and native plants. It is a place where the rare and uncommon seem common place.

But the refuge is for people too. In recent years the refuge has seen 3.7 million visits for fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, education, camping, and boating. Quietly and with little fanfare, the refuge attracts more visitors each year than Yellowstone National Park.

Refuge Manager Don Hultman, who has worked at and visited refuges throughout the country, is still amazed by the story and the promise of this place.

"I continue to marvel at the foresight of Dilg and others who helped set-aside this remarkable landscape. It is truly a gift to current generations, and a gift to be passed on through the ages," Hultman said.

Hultman said despite challenges like sedimentation, invasive species, and continued surrounding development, he remains hopeful that Upper Miss will remain one of the nation's premier wildlife refuges.

"Each generation marks history with challenges faced and met. I know future generations will see that this refuge continues to provide a home for wildlife and a place for people," he said.

Hultman said no special events are planned for the anniversary, although the refuge's Winona District will be sponsoring a special float during the Steamboat Days Parade in Winona, Minn. June 21st.

For more information on refuge wildlife and recreation opportunities, visit the refuge website at www.fws.gov/midwest/UpperMississippiRiver/.

In addition to being the most visited refuge in the country, the "Upper Miss" Refuge has the added complexity of a major navigation system, including 11 locks and dams, within its boundary. It is also a world-class fish and wildlife area which harbors 306 species of birds; 119 species of fish; more than 200 active bald eagle nests; thousands of heron and egret nests; spectacular concentrations of canvasback ducks, tundra swans, and white pelicans; and several threatened or endangered species. The refuge is one of 550 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

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 www.fws.gov.

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