

## **Appendix D: Landowner Questions and Answers**

### **Return to Fairfield Marsh Conservation Partnership Environmental Assessment**

## **Appendix D. Landowner Questions and Answers**

Contents: Letter #1, received June 7, 1999  
Letter #2, received June 22, 1999  
Frequently Asked Questions Brochure (March 1999)

**Letter #1:** In June, the Service received a written set of detailed questions concerning the refuge proposal from a group of area landowners and others. The Service responded to the letter and it was also presented to the Executive Committee of the Columbia County Board of Supervisors. All of the issues discussed in the letter and additional topics will be presented in the forthcoming EA. However, we believe that others may have the same questions about the refuge proposal and would like to see detailed answers. We hope that you will find the following reprint helpful.

### **1) What if I don't want to sell my land? Will the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service condemn my land against my wishes?**

While the Service, as part of the United States Government, has eminent domain authority, it does not use it except to clear title or preserve critically-imperiled endangered species (a rare instance). The latter is not the case with the proposed refuge project. Service policy is to acquire land only from willing sellers. Landowners within a project boundary retain all of the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership. The presence of refuge lands does not afford the Service any authority to impose restrictions on any private lands. Control of access, land use practices, water management practices, hunting, fishing, and any other general use is limited to those lands in which the Service has acquired an appropriate real estate interest.

### **2) If I don't want to sell my land, but do want to restore the area, can I sign up for the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) instead? This assumes that my land meets the criteria for WRP.**

The WRP is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service. This agency mandates its own funding and control for WRP, which allows voluntary sign-up for landowners. Since WRP restores wetlands and wildlife habitat, the Service supports this program as well as other programs available with the Department of Agriculture.

### **3) I don't want my land included in the mapping of the refuge study area, how do I get it removed?**

A specific study area must be approved by the Service Director before we are authorized to study any refuge proposal. If the refuge project is approved and a landowner wants to sell a tract to the Service, we have to show that his or her tract is within the area proposed and studied. The acquisition boundary only authorizes the Service to purchase lands delineated on the map. Land acquisition is a long-term process and to omit certain tracts during the current planning process may ultimately require revision and subsequent delays 15 or 20 years from now due to changing

landowner interests, new ownerships or land use. Leaving land within the proposed boundary essentially gives the current and future landowners another option for disposing of land without creating any obligations or restrictions.

**4) Scenario: There are 10 landowners on one drainage ditch in the drainage district. Nine of those landowners sell to the Service. One does not. It is essential to his farming operation that the drainage be maintained. Will the Service be responsible for their share of the maintenance costs? Will the Service contribute to the cost of maintaining these sensitive drainages, or drainage improvements of the Lower Baraboo River Drainage area?**

The scenario does not state if the Drainage District is solvent based on Wisconsin Drainage Statutes; i.e., does one person constitute a drainage district. Regardless, the Service's intent is to have no impact on drainage from neighboring lands and to follow state laws regarding drainage activities. Service staff work with adjacent landowners and drainage districts to ensure that existing drainage facilities or patterns are not negatively impacted by refuge activity. If this project is approved, detailed hydrologic planning will be undertaken for all water-related activities on Service lands to ensure that Service activities do not alter drainage in any way that would cause flooding or drainage problems to private lands.

The Service has the authority to negotiate with special taxing districts for a one-time, up-front payment for assessments foregone (benefits anticipated to be received by the district). The payment would be sufficient to cover the prorated value of the benefits over an indefinite period. In turn, the district would acknowledge receiving just compensation for their interest and rights in the specific tract being acquired and would not retain any encumbrances on that tract of land. The Service will limit such negotiations to state chartered districts; we cannot negotiate long-term agreements with unincorporated groups of landowners calling themselves a district.

**5) How am I assured that if I don't sell my land and my neighbor does, that restoration of the wetland on his property will not make my land wetter? What if it does? What do I have to do to prove my case and seek a remedy?**

The Service would not cause any artificial increase of the natural level, width, or flow of waters without ensuring that the impact would be limited to lands in which the Service has acquired an appropriate real estate interest from a willing seller; e.g., fee title ownership, flowage easement, cooperative agreement. If Service activities inadvertently created a water-related problem for any private landowner (flooding, soil saturation or deleterious increase in water table height, etc.), the problem would be corrected at the Service's expense.

Through our Partner's for Fish and Wildlife Program, the Service has restored over 10,000 wetlands in the Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region, which includes Wisconsin. The expertise gained through this experience and by coordinating with partners like the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and others would help us achieve the wetland goals of the proposed refuge and not adversely affect neighboring land.

**6) Will my land be more regulated if I choose not to sell but to border the refuge?**

No. Regulations pertaining to pesticides, drainage, pollution, hunting, fishing, trapping, etc., on private land are managed and enforced by other local, state or Federal agencies. The Service must abide by these regulations the same as any other landowner. Owning land adjacent to Service land does not change any of the regulations that currently apply to your land and does not impose any new regulations on your land.

**7) Scenario: I don't want to sell or restore my land, my neighbor does. It makes sense that if his land is restored for wildlife that there will be more wildlife in the area. This will result in increased crop damage. How will I be compensated for this crop damage? Can there be an expedited process and special funding established? What strings will be attached, example: public hunting?**

The scenario assumes that if a refuge is established, certain wildlife species would increase that would depredate on crops and that ongoing crop damage would escalate. This assumption may not be entirely correct. The Service policy is to use tools such as hunting, lure crops and habitat manipulation to ensure that wildlife, particularly Canada geese, do not cause depredation problems on neighboring farmland. While the development of wildlife food plots is not a primary objective of this refuge, it does remain an option, depending on the site, type of wildlife, and type of food plot. Service policy is to use the most natural means available to meet wildlife objectives. If a localized depredation problem were to arise, the Service, working in concert with the USDA Animal Damage Control Division, would be available to assist in developing a damage abatement program specific to the problem.

In Wisconsin, farmers may submit crop damage claims to the Wildlife Damage and Abatement Claims Program. According to Department of Natural Resource figures, in 1997 deer damage represented approximately 92 percent of the assessed losses, with 7 percent coming from bear damage, and 1 percent from goose damage. A total of 796 shooting permits were issued under the program.

Refuge objectives are to enhance the habitat for wetland and grassland birds. There are no specific objectives for increasing deer, raccoons, and wild turkeys that might depredate on crops. Natural foods and cover on refuge lands would provide an alternative to crops. Overabundant wildlife populations can also be reduced through public hunting or trapping on Service lands and this can decrease problems on surrounding private lands.

**8) How do we arrive at a value for our land? Can we use our own appraiser?**

The Service is required by law to offer market value for lands to be acquired. Market value is determined by a professionally prepared appraisal that is reviewed and approved by an experienced review appraiser. The review appraiser assures that the value offered is reflective of the current real estate market. Market value is estimated by evaluating recent sales of comparable properties in the vicinity.

Generally, agency staff appraisers or private firms working under Federal contract complete the appraisal reports for the Service land acquisition program. Each appraiser must be licensed and certified to work within the specific state and must follow the professional standards of the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practices. In addition, Federal regulations implementing the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (Uniform Act) and the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition (UASFLA) must be adhered to for each report. The Service pays all costs associated with these appraisals.

Federal law or policy does not preclude the use of an appraisal report submitted by a landowner. However, the appraiser must always adhere to the same provisions as listed above and each report will be examined by a Service review appraiser. These provisions may differ from a private appraisal firm's standard methods. The Service will provide a copy of the Uniform Act, UASFLA and the Standard Appraisal Report Specifications to the appraiser. However, the landowner would assume a certain amount of risk that an appraisal may not meet Federal standards and could not pass a review. Also, the Uniform Act does not list reimbursement of a landowner's appraisal costs as an eligible expense.

The Uniform Act does allow for updating of appraisals under certain circumstances. If overlooked information is presented by the landowner, or a material change in the character or condition of the property occurs, the Service will have the appraisal updated or obtain a new appraisal.

**9) If I want to sell my land, how does it work? Payment all at once? Payment over time?**

Payments for land transactions are usually made in one lump sum. Since the amount of taxes cannot be determined at the time of closing, the Service will withhold the amount of the estimated taxes until the taxes are paid. Payment may also be made by installments for up to four years. However, no interest is paid on the outstanding balance.

**10) How long does the entire purchase process take? When would it start?**

The entire process from the time a Service employee meets with the landowner to initiate an appraisal until payment is made could take six to nine months. The length of time depends on whether any land surveys or title defect remedies are required.

The Aldo Leopold National Wildlife Refuge remains a proposal pending the outcome of the decision process. No funding for land acquisition has been appropriated by Congress and no other sources of public or private funds have been solicited. If approved, it may be a year or two before land acquisition could begin in the project area.

**11) Can I sell part of my land and keep part of my land?**

Yes, see question 13.

**12) My house is in the proposed refuge. What about moving expenses and the costs and problems of relocating?**

The Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended, provides for certain relocation benefits to home owners, businesses, and farm operators who choose to sell and relocate as a result of Federal acquisition. The law provides for benefits to eligible owners and tenants in the following areas: 1) reimbursement of reasonable moving and related expenses; 2) replacement housing payments under certain conditions; 3) relocation assistance services to help locate replacement housing, farm or business properties; and, 4) reimbursement of certain expenses incurred in selling real property to the government.

**13) Can I sell my land, but keep living in my house?**

Yes. Landowners decide what land or buildings to sell. This is discussed at the first meeting prior to an appraisal. Usually the landowner, appraiser, refuge manager and a realty specialist discuss all of the options for the land and buildings. If it is agreed that only a portion of a property will be sold, this land is staked or identified on the ground for the appraisal. A legal land survey will be made to determine exact acreage after a purchase option is signed.

Alternately, the landowner, under certain circumstances, may choose to sell the house to the Service and remain living in the house with a life-use reservation.

**14) What if I want to get into WRP now, but decide later to sell my land. Will the Service still be a willing buyer? Will they pay current market price or just the residual value?**

The Service can buy land encumbered with a WRP easement and may be interested in doing so depending on available funds and priorities. The land would be appraised at current market value with the valid easement, either 30-year or perpetual, as an encumbrance on the land. The appraiser must always consider the effect of any land use restrictions on a specific property's market value.

**15) I want to keep farming most of my land, but am willing to do some habitat improvement work and restoration on the least productive parts. Are there funds available to cover the costs of development and easement fees?**

The Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is a stewardship program that offers technical and financial assistance to private landowners to voluntarily restore wetlands, native grasslands, and other fish and wildlife habitats. The Service, along with a wide variety of partners, provides assistance and cost-sharing to complete work if the landowner agrees to maintain the area for a period of 10 years or more. Partners who contribute time and funds for these efforts include local conservation organizations, universities, businesses, school groups, other government agencies and private individuals.

Other agencies such as USDA and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as well as conservation groups such as Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Wisconsin Waterfowl Association, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon, and others provide funding assistance for private land habitat improvement.

In addition, local hunting, fishing, and conservation organizations often are willing to assist private landowners with wildlife habitat improvement projects. Many of these organizations have substantial financial and technical resources and are often a dedicated source of energy for wildlife habitat improvement on both private and public lands.

**16) How much were the property taxes for the included lands in 1998? What will the dollar value of the contribution be from the Service if they acquire the land? What percentage is this of the local taxes and how will it impact us locally? Is it possible for a special fund to be set aside to make up this difference?**

Any numbers we offer now would be an estimate. These issues will be addressed in the economic study currently under way as part of the environmental assessment, and more precise numbers will be available when the EA is released later this summer.

**17) Will the economic analysis include current farming activities? Will this be the standard of comparison? Will it examine economic impacts for the entire area?**

Industrial Economics, Inc., a private consulting firm, has received the contract for the economic study. The Service has requested a report that includes the potential local and regional impacts, including impacts on current farming activities and trends.

**18) Local comment has shown that this area already provides tremendous hunting and outdoor opportunities for area residents because of the willingness of local landowners to permit access. How much land in the refuge will be available for hunting, hiking, fishing, etc., and what percentage of the year will this land be available? What types of hunting will be allowed?**

The Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 identifies six priority uses: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation as wildlife-dependent recreational activities. These uses are encouraged on refuges when they are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. An Interim Compatibility Determination will be prepared and included with the environmental assessment. This certificate will state which of the six priority public uses currently occurs within the project area and which uses will be allowed until a Comprehensive Conservation Plan is prepared for the new refuge.

Public recreational use is permitted on nearly all national wildlife refuges. There are 56 national wildlife refuges in Region 3 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which includes Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Missouri. Of these, 49 are open to various public uses. The seven that are not open include two caves with endangered species and five islands used by colonial nesting birds.

**19) Will there be trails and roads through the proposed area? Will any current roads be eliminated?**

The Service does not close roads without township and county approval. Generally, closures are sought only if a road is landlocked by Service property and is a dead end. The current road system would remain the same unless access requires modification sometime in the future. Coordination with state, county, and township officials and residents would be required for any road closure.

The question of whether trails would be constructed goes back to Question 18. If a wildlife refuge is ultimately approved and enough land is purchased for a viable refuge, the Service will study whether or not a trail system would be compatible with the purpose of the refuge and needs of wildlife.

**20) Is there any plan to introduce threatened or endangered species to this area? Are there any reintroduction plans for other species?**

There is no plan to introduce threatened, endangered, or other plant or animal species to the project area. Any future reintroduction plans would require public participation and detailed environmental documentation.

**21) What personnel requirements will there be to operate the refuge? At what approximate cost to the taxpayers?**

In beginning stages when the land base is small, a new refuge could be managed administratively as a satellite refuge by an existing national wildlife refuge or wetland management district. As the land base increases, the complexity of habitat management and administration increases, and the new refuge would generally be assigned its own funding, equipment, and staff. Speaking very generally, a fully staffed refuge of this size would have about seven staff members and an annual operating budget of approximately \$600,000.

**22) How will the changed ecology affect the landowners who choose to continue to farm in the proposed area? Economically? In terms of laws or restrictions on activities in the area? In terms of value of the land differentiating from that which can be produced on the land? In terms of increased waste because of increased animal feeding and activity on farmland?**

In terms of ecology, the Service would promote good land stewardship and be a good neighbor. Reduction of soil erosion and flooding would occur as well as providing a more diverse landscape from an aesthetic standpoint. As stated in Questions 1 and 6, landowners within the project would retain all of their rights, privileges, and responsibilities of private land ownership. The presence of refuge lands in the project would not afford the Service any authority to impose restrictions on any private lands. Service control of access, land use practices, water management practices, hunting, fishing, and general use is limited only to those lands in which the Service purchases an appropriate real estate interest.

Landowners often ask about any possible land devaluation as a result of having their land located within a refuge boundary. Data from other Service projects indicates that during the course of acquiring land for developing refuges, the value of land within project boundaries, as well as lands adjacent to refuge boundaries, tends to increase over time. This is due, in part, to the increased demand created by other outdoor-oriented buyers interested in owning lands adjacent to a national wildlife refuge because of their enhanced recreational value. Likewise, it seems logical that the presence of a guaranteed willing buyer (the Service) would reassure lending institutions considering a secured loan using land inside a project area as collateral.

Crop damage is addressed in Question 7.

### **23) Why does the Service feel that it is so important to acquire this land?**

The conservation and restoration of fish and wildlife habitats is an integral part of the mission of the Service. We believe that the proposed Aldo Leopold National Wildlife Refuge study area may have a tremendous potential to benefit waterfowl and declining wildlife species such as grassland-dependent birds, to restore a natural water regime, and to provide a place for people to appreciate the natural world. The area was chosen for further study based on these perceived values. The following short introduction to the Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System describes the importance we place on protecting land for wildlife and people.

The **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, which includes more than 500 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fish and wildlife management offices, and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands and grasslands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

The **National Wildlife Refuge System** is the world's largest and most diverse collection of lands set aside specifically for wildlife. The refuge system began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt designated 3-acre Pelican Island, a pelican and heron rookery in Florida, as a national bird sanctuary. Like Pelican Island, many early wildlife refuges were created for herons, egrets, and other water birds. Other refuges were set aside for large mammals like elk and bison. But by far the most have been created to protect migratory waterfowl. This is a result of the United States' responsibilities under international treaties for migratory bird conservation and legislation such as the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929. Today, national wildlife refuges offer the public a wide variety of recreational and educational opportunities. Many refuges have fishing and hunting programs, visitor centers, wildlife trails, and environmental education programs. Nationwide, some 34 million visitors annually hunt, fish, observe, and photograph wildlife or participate in interpretive activities on Service national wildlife refuges.

The former Fairfield Marsh, the Baraboo Bluffs and the riverine systems of the Leech and Baraboo have long been recognized for their existing and potential wetland and wildlife values. The Baraboo Bluffs are a National Natural Landmark and have been identified by the National Park Service, The Nature Conservancy, and others for additional protection. The Service's approach to the proposed Aldo Leopold National Wildlife Refuge project would promote this idea of landscape-level protection within the lower Baraboo River watershed. A large block of habitat combining the proposal with the Pine Island Wildlife Management Area, Leopold Memorial Reserve, and other habitat would support wildlife species in trouble, especially marsh and grassland-dependent bird species.

The refuge project would provide additional benefits for fish through the restoration of natural watercourses. At one time, Leech Creek supported viable trout populations throughout its length. Today, native and stocked trout are found in limited numbers only in the upper half of the

stream. Catastrophic downstream flooding events and resulting damage, soil erosion or poor water quality would also be alleviated by restoration of the Fairfield Marsh.

People as well as wildlife may benefit from the establishment of a new national wildlife refuge. The location of this proposal near Interstate Highways 90/94 and State Highway 33, could provide an excellent opportunity for wildlife-dependent recreational activities, environmental education and interpretation.

As we said at the beginning of this letter, many of these questions are being studied in the environmental assessment and more detailed information will be available later this summer. At the same time, dialogue is an essential part of a refuge proposal and the Service appreciates this opportunity to respond to landowners' questions. We look forward to continuing to work with you and all interested parties on this project.

**Letter #2:** A separate short list of additional questions was received in June from one landowner.

**When the Service purchases land for a Waterfowl Production Area, a one-time lump sum payment was made to Caledonia Township to offset property tax shortfalls. Since annual payments made by the Service to the townships are calculated in the same way for both Waterfowl Production Areas and refuges, why don't refuges receive the same one-time payment to cover the shortfall?**

The Trust Payment Program was established under special, delegated authority from the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission to the Director of the Service and applies solely to the Waterfowl Production Area Program, which has its own legal authorization (Public Law 85-585). The one-time Trust payment is made for a specific property to the local taxing authority. The Waterfowl Production Area program is funded primarily through the sale of Migratory Bird Conservation Stamps, more commonly called Duck Stamps, and import duties on arms and ammunition. In contrast, most National Wildlife Refuge land acquisitions occur using funds appropriated by Congress through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Congress has not authorized the Service to provide additional payments beyond the Refuge Revenue Sharing Program for LWCF acquisitions.

**The payment in-lieu of property taxes comes from what source of funds?**

The Refuge Revenue Sharing Program is funded from the sale of products or privileges such as timber, grazing or oil and gas leases on Federal lands. Since 1935, the Fish and Wildlife Service has made these payments to counties for refuge land under its administration. Originally, counties received 25 percent of net revenues from the sale of various products or privileges from refuge lands located within the county. The result was that many counties received no payments as no revenue was generated from local refuge lands. The Refuge Revenue Sharing Act was amended in 1964 to provide for a payment of the greater of 25 percent of net receipts, \$0.75 per acre or 3/4 of 1 percent of the adjusted purchase price for all purchased land. The Refuge Revenue Sharing Act was again amended in 1978 by Public Law 95-469. Important changes were: (1) Congress is authorized to appropriate funds to make up any shortfall in the revenue sharing fund; (2) all lands administered solely or primarily by the FWS (not just refuges) qualify for revenue sharing; and (3) payments to units of local government can be used for any governmental purpose.

The amount of a revenue sharing payment is directly tied to the **appraised** market value of a property. In some cases, annual payments to local governments exceed what the local tax, based on assessed value, would have been if the land was still in private ownership. In other cases, revenue sharing payments fall short of the local assessed property tax revenue. Some members of Congress have recognized this fact and have taken steps to remedy the situation. H.R. 701, the Conservation and Reinvestment Act, and a companion Senate bill, were introduced in March, 1999. These bills contain a provision for full funding of the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act. The proposed source of funds would be federal off-shore oil and gas lease revenues.

**The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) is a USDA program which pays landowners to restore previously converted and farmed wetlands, and is open to all landowners of wetland property. The program is implemented by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The USFWS uses this USDA program to restore wetland and then purchases the residual value of the land from the landowner with this WRP easement in place. If the goal of restoring wetland habitat has been accomplished by the USDA easement, why does the Service need to own the land as opposed to the land remaining privately owned (i.e. hunting groups, conservation groups or foundations, etc.)?**

The WRP is a valuable conservation program and the Service supports it. However, the NRCS relies on the voluntary participation of all landowners in a restorable wetland basin. The landowners in the former Fairfield Marsh core basin were approached in 1996 and asked about their interest in the WRP program. Not enough interest was expressed at that time for the NRCS to pursue the project.

The policy of the Service is to obtain the least amount of land interest necessary to meet national fish and wildlife conservation goals and objectives. The WRP is one specific tool that assists in this effort. Generally, the Service does not seek to acquire the residual estate on lands within a Waterfowl Production Area encumbered by a permanent WRP easement. However, the residual estate is sought for lands enrolled with only a 30 year WRP easement or at a landowner's insistence. Also, the residual estate is usually pursued for all WRP parcels that are found within the boundaries of a National Wildlife Refuge. Refuge management actions, especially sensitive habitat protection, large scale habitat restorations and public hunts, can become difficult if WRP easements are intermixed with public lands.

# Planning a New or Expanded National Wildlife Refuge: Frequently Asked Questions

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving the nation’s migratory bird and fish species; protecting endangered plants and animals; and providing critical habitat for the diverse living resources that



exist in the United States. The National Wildlife Refuge System was established in 1903 and is a key part of achieving that mission as well as providing people with opportunities to enjoy natural environments that range from arctic

tundra to coastal salt marshes, deserts and bottomland hardwood forests.

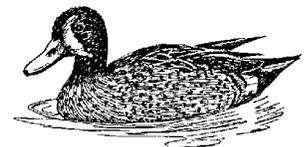
Public participation is a vital part of the Service’s refuge planning process. Environmental documents such as Environmental Assessments are prepared when a new refuge is proposed or an expansion to an existing refuge is considered, and many opportunities for involvement by residents, elected officials, business representatives and local, regional and state agencies are built into the environmental documentation process.

The purpose of creating new refuges and expanding existing refuges is to preserve wildlife, plants and their habitat for the benefit of everyone. At the same time, we appreciate the concerns voiced by many communities about refuge planning and what it means to land owners, rural communities, agriculture, hunting and fishing, and local government. This list of frequently asked questions is based on questions asked during refuge planning projects throughout Region 3 (which includes Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan,

Ohio, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Missouri). These questions and answers are general in scope; you will have many opportunities to ask questions about specific refuge projects throughout the planning process.

**Why locate a national wildlife refuge here?:** A number of factors go into determining locations for new wildlife refuges. Generally, the Service looks at areas with significant wildlife values or the potential for restoration of wildlife values to an area. In many cases a proposal is seeking to fill a void in habitat availability for a group of species of federal interest or for a significant single species, such as an endangered species. For example, an area may provide outstanding habitat for grassland-dependant birds, which is a group of migratory birds that has seen

consistently declining populations over the past several years. The Service may be considering a particular location because



is has great potential for meeting other established objectives, such as providing environmental education opportunities.

**Will my property be condemned?:** Service policy is to acquire land only from willing sellers.

**If I do not chose to sell my land, will my rights as a property owner be infringed as a result of the refuge designation?:** No. If a refuge is established, the Service will have no more authority over private land within or adjacent to the boundaries of the refuge than any other landowner.

**Is buying land the only option?:** There are a number of alternatives for achieving the natural resource goals of a proposed refuge. Resource preservation and restoration options include cooperative agreements, easements and landowner technical assistance. The Service is eager to work with landowners to find an alternative that is



acceptable to them and that contributes to refuge objectives.

**How will the creation of a wildlife refuge affect the area's tax base?:** The Service tries to alleviate the impact of wildlife refuges on state and local taxes by reimbursing local governments for lost tax revenues. The formula that generally yields the highest return for a local unit of government is \$7.50 per \$1,000 of the property's fair market value. Several states have programs that also supplement payments to local school districts if the tax base declines due to the acquisition of public land.

**What is the economic impact of a refuge on a community?:** In many cases, refuges actually draw people into the community, generating income for tourist-oriented businesses and services. *Banking on Nature*, the Service's study of the economic benefits of refuges, found that nationally visitors contribute more than \$400 million every year to local economics. The publication reports that in 1995 non-resident funds generated at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in southern Illinois totaled \$3.29 million in the Marion, Ill., region and 76 additional jobs were created. Non-resident refuge visitors spent about \$1.8 million in the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge area in central Wisconsin in 1995, according to *Banking on Nature*, and 41 jobs were added in the area.

**Will drainage be changed in a way that affects my property?:** The Service's intent is to have no impact on drainage from neighboring lands and to follow state laws regarding drainage activities. Service staff work with adjacent landowners and drainage districts to ensure that existing drainage facilities or patterns are not negatively impacted by refuge activity.

**Who is responsible for controlling noxious weeds on refuge property?:** The Service's policy is to control plants listed as noxious weeds by States. This control uses non-chemical methods when possible and chemical treatments when necessary to prevent noxious weeds from spreading to adjacent private farmland.

**When and how can I express my opinions about the proposal?:** You can express an opinion anytime and there are a number of ways to do so. You can talk to Service personnel at one of the several public open house events that will be scheduled throughout the course of this project, or you can schedule a one-on-one meeting with Service staff to discuss the refuge proposal. If you have access to the Internet, you can address e-mail to: [r3planning@fws.gov](mailto:r3planning@fws.gov) at anytime. You can obtain more information and make comments about this project and others that are under way at: [www.fws.gov/r3pao/planning/index.htm](http://www.fws.gov/r3pao/planning/index.htm)



**A refuge boundary has been established for a wildlife refuge proposal before public participation or final approval; does what I have to say about that boundary matter, or is it a done deal?:** It is not a done deal, and what you have to say about the proposed boundary will be considered in the proposal evaluation process. The Service's Regional Offices are required to establish a tentative study area before an evaluation can be initiated. These initial boundaries are flexible and,

if the project is approved, the actual area proposed could be smaller or larger than the initial proposal reflects.

**If the refuge is established, is the planning process the only opportunity I will have to provide input into what goes on at the refuge?:**

Community involvement is important to the success of a wildlife refuge. The Service encourages public participation in developing detailed management plans for the refuge. Many refuges have citizen groups that support the refuge through actively participating in refuge activities and operations.



**Some people contend that the Service is destroying farmland when land is**

**taken out of agricultural production and restored as wetlands, grasslands or other habitat; how do you respond?:** Acquiring land as a national wildlife refuge protects it from development. If the nation's lawmakers someday decide it is needed for agricultural production, it will be there. The soil will actually rebuild itself when indigenous vegetative cover is restored; on the other hand, development can degrade soil and extensive commercial or dense residential development makes it very unlikely that the land will ever be restored to agricultural purposes in the future.

**Is a federal refuge automatically closed to hunting, fishing and other recreational activities?:**

Not necessarily. The alternatives considered in refuge planning are mandated by Congress (Public Law 105-57, Oct. 9, 1997) to allow compatible wildlife-dependent recreational public uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation. Goals and objectives

are identified for the refuge (with public input), and the specific public uses are determined based on their consistency with the objectives established for the refuge. A refuge that serves as production areas for a federally endangered species is likely to offer less access for people during periods when the endangered species is present than at other times of the year. In Region 3, 88 percent of the refuges offer public recreational opportunities. Those that are closed include small islands or caves where endangered species or colonial nesting birds are present.

**Where does funding for land acquisition for wildlife refuges come from?:** Typically, money to acquire land for national refuges comes from the Land and Water Conservation Fund or the Migratory Bird Fund, both of which were established through federal law. The Land and Water Conservation Fund primarily includes the sale of products on federal land, such as offshore oil and gas leases. The Migratory Bird Fund is derived from the sale of federal duck stamps.



**Why is the federal government involved in planning wildlife refuges?**

**Why shouldn't states manage their own refuges?:** Wildlife and habitat simply do not conform to state boundaries, and neither does citizen investment in the nation's natural resources. For example, preserving migratory waterfowl habitat requires a comprehensive approach because flight patterns for particular species can extend across the entire length of the country. Conservation practices in one state would be jeopardized or even nullified by lesser efforts in another state along the flight pattern. Citizenship too extends beyond state lines, and we all have an investment in preserving this county's unique or endangered species and habitats regardless of

where we live. While state departments of natural resources are responsible for managing the bulk of wildlife and habitat issues; federal involvement in refuge planning reflects this broader public interest.

**How can you properly manage another refuge if you already have a maintenance backlog on existing refuges?:** National wildlife refuges are not approved overnight, as this brochure suggests. If a wildlife refuge proposal is ultimately approved, the Service's policy of only buying land from willing sellers means that it may be years before there is enough contiguous land for a refuge to be viable. The Service continues to make progress on decreasing its maintenance backlog, but a great deal of habitat could be lost to development or further degradation if we did not get the ball rolling now.

**Who will run the refuge if it is established?:** It might be assigned its own staff and budget, however if there is an existing refuge station nearby, staff from that refuge might be assigned to run it.

**How can I find out more about the National Wildlife Refuge System?:** Region 3 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be happy to send you additional information on national refuge planning. You can request information by writing to us at: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ascertainment and Planning, 1 Federal Drive, Ft. Snelling, MN 55111; or by calling toll free 1-800-247-1247.

An overview of the refuge system can be found at <http://bluegoose.arw.rq.fws.gov>  
Region 3's home page can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/r3pao/planning/index.htm>

**What happens next if a national refuge is ultimately approved?** Several steps will follow the approval of a new refuge. First, funding must be obtained through congressional action and a national budget ranking process. Second, the refuge is formally established when fee title or an easement interest is acquired in a piece of land within the approved boundary. Finally, detailed management planning in the form of a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) will provide future management direction. With public input, the CCP establishes definite goals and objectives for the refuge and identifies specific strategies for achieving those goals. Specific issues, such as cleaning up a contaminated area, the presence of an endangered species or managing an overabundant deer herd, are addressed in separate, step-down plans. The CCP also identifies an implementation and monitoring plan, and progress toward the goals and strategies are reviewed on a regular basis.

