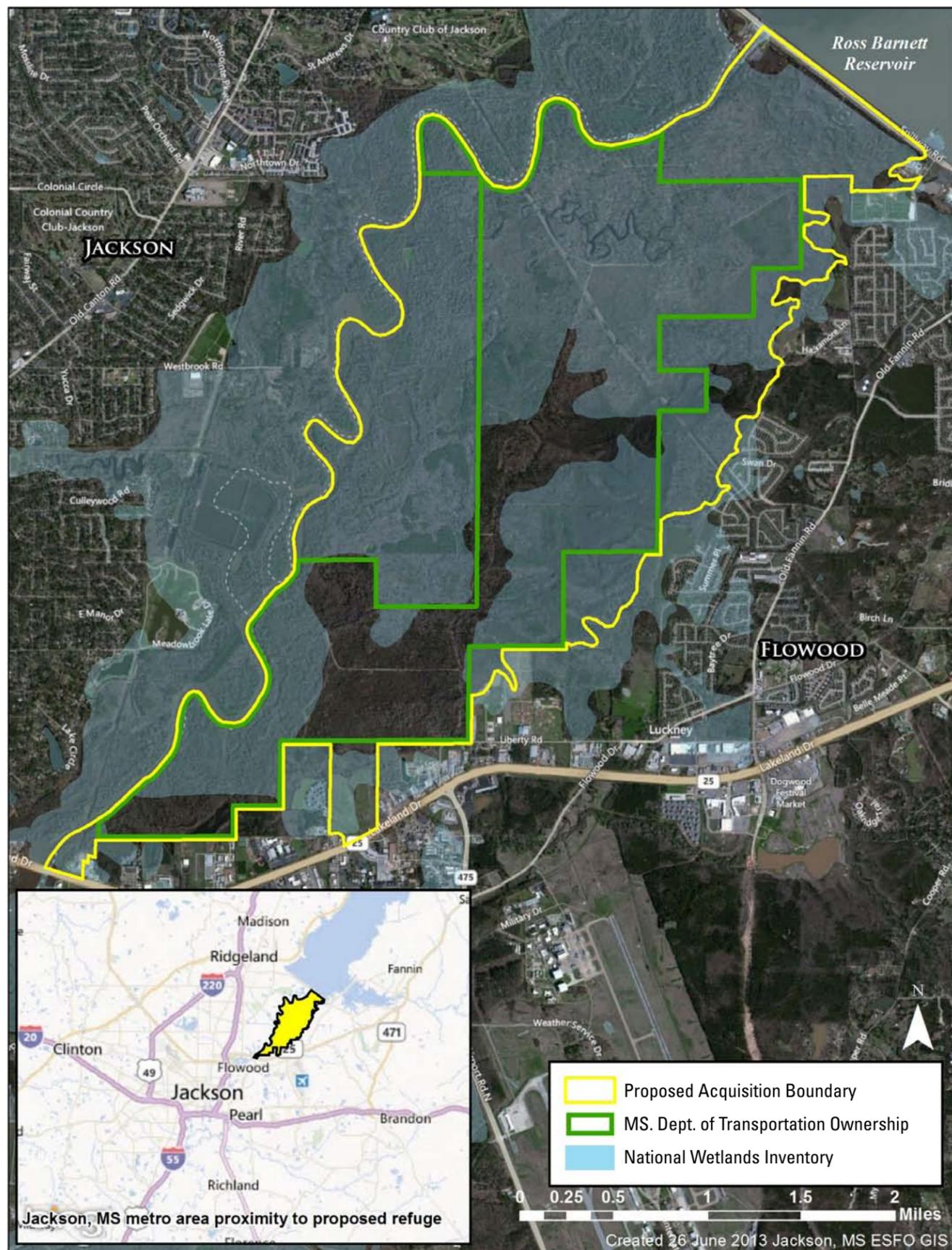


Map of the Proposed National Wildlife Refuge in Central Mississippi



# Proposed National Wildlife Refuge in Central Mississippi

*The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to establish an urban national wildlife refuge along the Pearl River in the Jackson, Mississippi, metropolitan area. The project area contains approximately 5,000 acres and is bounded by the Ross Barnett Reservoir to the north and Lakeland Drive (Mississippi Highway 25) to the south.*

The establishment of the proposed refuge would enable the Service to protect a vital portion of the Pearl River bottomland riparian ecosystem in an urbanized area, as well as offer wildlife-dependent public use opportunities within the greater Jackson metropolitan area. Cultural and historical resources would be protected and environmental education and interpretive programs would allow the public to better understand and appreciate the important natural resources in this area.

The purposes of the proposed refuge would be to:

- 1) restore and protect freshwater forested/shrub wetlands, including seasonally flooded bottomland hardwoods and cypress swamps;
- 2) conserve, protect, and manage migratory birds and other interjurisdictional trust species;
- 3) contribute to the recovery of two federally listed species – the ringed map turtle and gulf sturgeon; and
- 4) provide wildlife-dependent public use opportunities.



*From cypress swamps to scenic sandbars, the proposed national wildlife refuge includes a wide range of picturesque ecosystems. Credit: David Felder/USFWS*

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

### Benefits to the Public

- Protect a vital portion of the Pearl River bottomland hardwood riparian ecosystem in an urbanized area.
- Provide wildlife-dependent public use opportunities like hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation within the greater Jackson metropolitan area.
- Protect cultural and historical resources within the property.
- Develop environmental education and interpretive programs to highlight the important natural resources of the area.
- Enhance the ecological functioning of the Pearl River Basin through connections with existing conservation lands and establishment of wildlife corridors.

### Background

The proposed National Wildlife Refuge in Central Mississippi would be incorporated into the Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge Complex. This complex currently encompasses seven refuges and is responsible for managing and maintaining over 100,000 acres in the Mississippi delta region.

The proposed refuge includes the largest contiguous piece of property under one ownership between the reservoir and Highway 25 (Lakeland Drive) and lies within a highly urbanized portion of the greater Jackson area. The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration have pooled resources to purchase this property to establish a wetland and stream mitigation bank under the Clean Water Act, administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Once the Mitigation Banking Instrument is approved by the Corps, this property will be transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, along with managing funds, after all restoration work is completed by MDOT.

The Service's National Wetlands Inventory classifies the majority of the project area as freshwater forested/shrub wetlands. The habitat, which is influenced by frequent overbank and backwater flooding from the adjacent Pearl River and tributaries, is predominately a southern floodplain forest comprised of various ecological communities including: cypress/tupelo sloughs, bottomland hardwood forest, mixed pine/oak forest and pure loblolly pine timber stands.



*The brightly colored prothonotary warbler, a neotropical migratory bird, lives and breeds in the proposed refuge area during spring. Credit: John and Karen Hollingsworth*



*The ringed map turtle, a threatened species, is only found in the Pearl River system in Mississippi and Louisiana. Credit: Robert Jones/MS Dept. Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks*



*Anglers of all ages will enjoy fishing in the area. Credit: Dove Barnes/USFWS*



*These mussels, from a bed along the river, offer just one of countless environmental education opportunities available on the proposed refuge. Credit: John Ruskey/Quapaw Canoe Company*



*Canoeing kids paddling on the Pearl. Credit: John Ruskey/Quapaw Canoe Company*

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The only significant higher ground is a slightly elevated ridge in the center of the property. Since the 1970s, most of the property has been intensively managed for timber production.

### Proposed Refuge Planning Schedule

#### November 2013

Conduct scoping meetings to gather feedback from the public on the preliminary proposal.

#### December 2013 - February 2014

Review the public's comments and develop a Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment.

#### March 2014

Release the Draft Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment for public comment.

#### April 2014

Review and prepare responses to the public's comments.

#### April - May 2014

Revise the draft plan into a final document.

#### June 2014

Submit the document for final consideration.

### Contact

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*Nature watchers can raise their binoculars, focus their scopes, or click their cameras on the abundant wildlife species in the proposed refuge area. Credit: USFWS*



*Kayakers taking a break on a beautiful Pearl River sandbar. Credit: John Ruskey/Quapaw Canoe Company*



*A young boy learns about archery. Credit: USFWS*



*Hikers on a winter walk through a shallow slough in the proposed national wildlife refuge. Credit: David Felder/USFWS*