



Proposed Expansion of Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to expand the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Bolivar County Mississippi by an additional 46,000 acres to increase the effectiveness of the refuge as a fully functioning bottomland hardwood forest. The refuge was established in 1991 and currently manages 9,691 acres.

The proposed expansion area is located west of the current refuge holdings. The lands within this proposal lie between the Dahomey NWR and the Mississippi River.

Benefits

- Increase and link available habitat for wintering waterfowl and many other species.
- Maintain and enhance recreational opportunities in the region.
- Enhance public use opportunities include hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

Background

Dahomey NWR was originally established to provide habitat for migratory birds and to protect wetlands. In the original Land Protection Plan, the refuge was specifically proposed to provide habitat for wintering waterfowl and breeding habitat for wood ducks and other migratory birds. The refuge currently manages bottomland forests for neotropical migrants and wintering waterfowl, provides flooded farm fields for wintering waterfowl, and manages a nest box program for wood duck breeding. These activities would be expanded to any new acquisitions, especially managing bottomland hardwood forests for neotropical migrants and wintering waterfowl.



Becky Rosamond/USFWS

Historically, the expansion area was bottomland hardwood forest. Construction of the Mississippi River mainline levee and drainage projects afforded flood protection to approximately 28,000 acres and enabled the majority of this area to be cleared.

Currently, less than five percent of the protected area contains bottomland hardwood forest. The bulk of the land is still being used for agricultural production, primarily rice, soybeans, cotton, and winter wheat. The remaining 18,000 acres are located inside the Mississippi River mainline levee and are classified as batture land (French for flood plain). This area is largely forested and subjected to annual flooding and is used mainly for recreational hunting.

The majority of additional lands acquired would be restored back to bottomland hardwood forest by planting bare-root seedlings. The batture lands that would be included provide significant habitat for migrating neotropical songbirds as well as wintering waterfowl. These lands are included in the Whittington Bird Conservation Area.

Bird Conservation Areas were developed by the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture as focal areas for forest bird management. Acquisition of lands within this project area and subsequent reforestation would link the Whittington Bird Conservation Area with the Dahomey Bird Conservation Areas and increase the core forest area available for forest interior nesting songbirds.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Creating a travel corridor linking Dahomey NWR to Arkansas' "Big Woods" provides additional positive benefits for a variety of species in a healthier system.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks has several radio-collared black bears (a state-listed species) that use the batture land year-round. Reforesting the area between Dahomey and the batture land would provide a vital travel corridor for these bears, and many other species as well.

The ultimate goal of this project is providing habitat linkages between the existing forests of Dahomey and the batture land, which would provide a travel corridor between Dahomey NWR and the 150,000 acre White River NWR.



Woods with cane by Becky Rosamond/USFWS

Schedule for the Proposed Refuge Expansion

May 2012 (Date TBD)

Public scoping meeting to gather feedback on proposal

May 2012

Review comments

July 2012

Draft LPP and EA

September-October 2012

Final decision expected from the Service.

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Black-bellied whistling ducks by Larry Pace



Iris fulva by Becky Rosamond, USFWS

Frequently Asked Questions

How would the Dahomey National Wildlife Refuge be expanded?

If the expansion to the acquisition boundary is approved, the Service would work only with willing landowners to acquire an interest in the land through several methods, including fee simple purchases, conservation easements, leases, lands set aside through habitat conservation plans, and/or cooperative agreements. All lands and waters acquired would be managed by the Service as part of the Dahomey NWR.

There are several landowners within the proposed expansion area. The largest single ownership is 9,875 acres, and there are several in the 500 – 1,000 acre range. Based on current unmet mitigation needs in the upper Mississippi Delta by several agencies, the majority of the lands within the proposed expansion area could be acquired by other agencies and transferred to the Service for management. Any mitigation land acquisition will be in fee title because most would be reforested or used to provide wetland habitat for wildlife. The Service also may need to acquire lands to link up these tracts.

What is an acquisition boundary?

An acquisition boundary is the area within which the Service is authorized to negotiate with landowners willing to sell their land or interests in their land to the Service.

Acquisition boundaries for refuges are typically approved by the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The U.S. Congress also may approve them if specific legislation is involved. The boundary itself does not give the Service any special jurisdiction or control over these lands.

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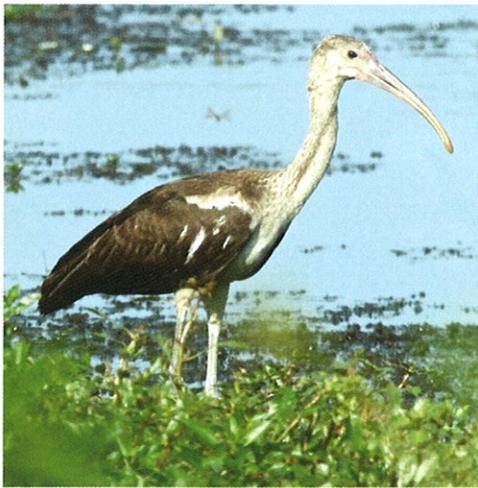
Lands become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System when they are acquired from willing sellers. Landowners who choose not to sell continue to manage and use their lands as before.

What if my land is within the approved acquisition boundary and I do not want to sell?

You maintain every right to your land, including the right to sell your land to whomever you choose. The Service only acquires land from willing sellers. An approved acquisition boundary does not require you to sell your property to the Service.

If the refuge is expanded, will I be able to hunt, fish, hike and bird watch on the newly acquired land?

Most likely. The Service gives priority consideration to six wildlife-dependent public uses on national wildlife refuges: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation. If these uses are determined to be compatible with the refuge purposes, and funds are available to manage them, they would be allowed.



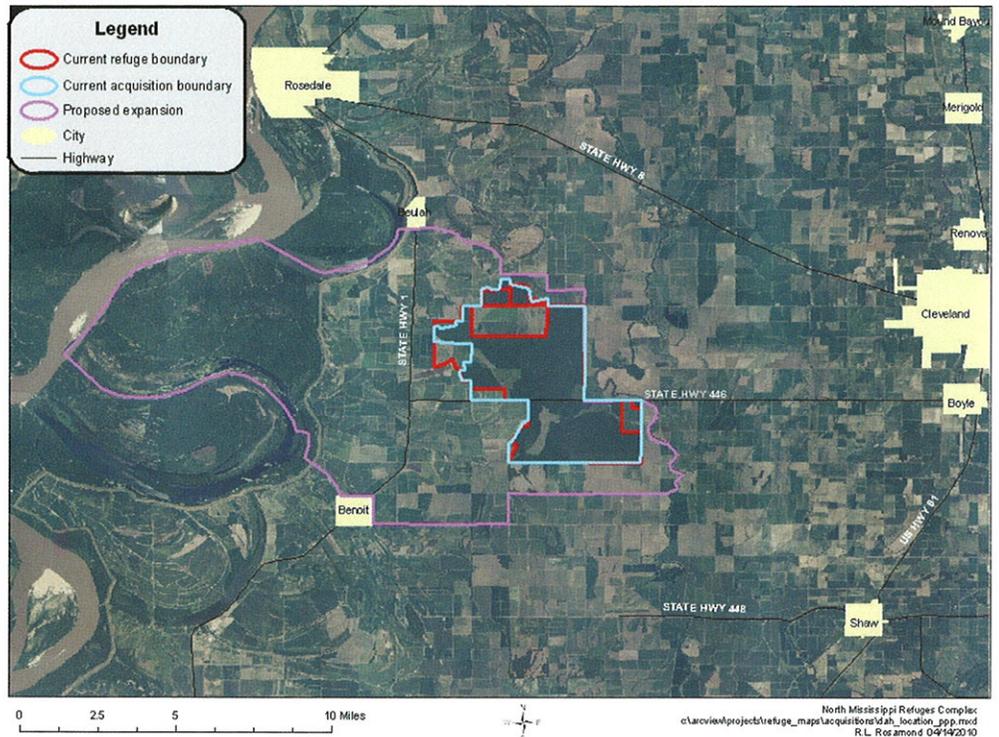
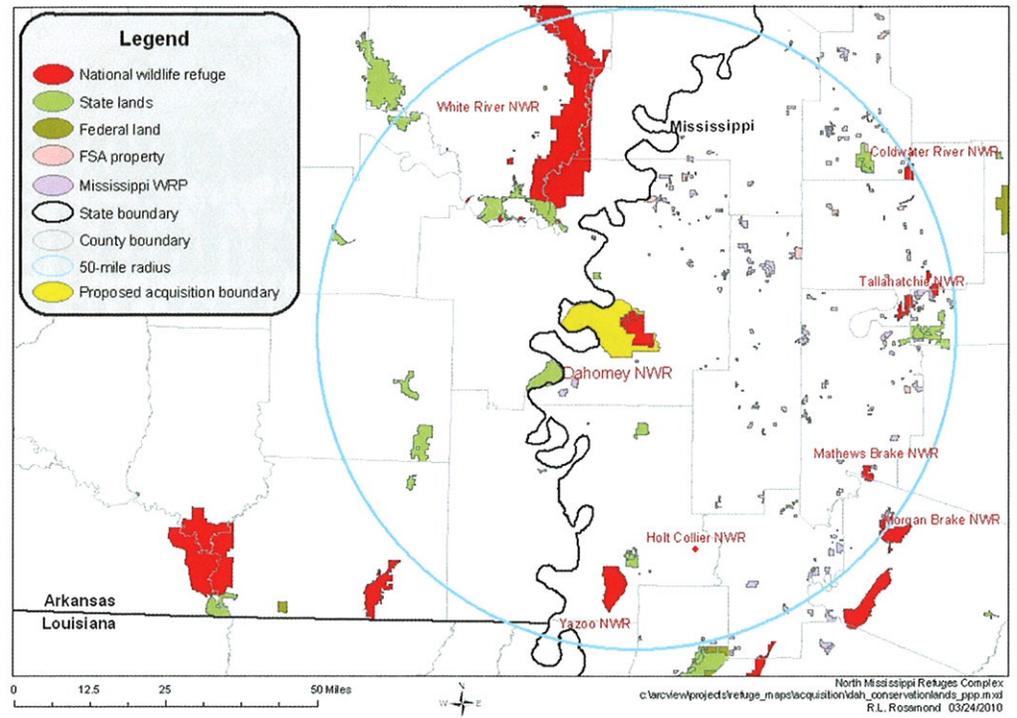
Immature white ibis by Larry Pace.

How would tax revenues be affected if lands become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System?

Lands acquired by the Service are removed from the tax rolls. However, through the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act (Public Law 95-469), the Service offsets the tax losses by annually paying county and other local governments an amount that often equals or exceeds that which would have been collected from taxes if the land was in private ownership. This law requires that the revenue sharing payments to the counties for the Service's land will be based on the greatest of:

- ¾ of 1 percent of the market value;
- 25 percent of the net receipts;
- or 75 cents per acre.

Funding for the payments comes from income generated on national wildlife refuges. If there is not enough revenue, Congress is authorized to appropriate money to make up the difference. Service lands are reappraised every five years to ensure that payments to local governments remain equitable.



On lands where the Service acquires only partial interest through easements, all taxes would remain the responsibility of the individual landowner.

How would the Service acquire funds to purchase additional refuge land?

It is anticipated that funding for this project would be provided through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.



A successful deer hunt at Dahomey NWR by Travis Carpenter/USFWS

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The Migratory Bird Conservation Fund includes monies collected from the sale of Federal Duck stamps, entrance fees from certain national wildlife refuges, and import duties on arms and ammunition. The authority for the use of these funds for land acquisition is the Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund includes monies collected from the sale of offshore oil leases. It is the principal source of funding for land acquisition for the purpose of outdoor recreation by the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service.



Otter by Larry Pace



Refuge visitors learn about insects during a volunteer lead interpretive hike by Larry Pace.