

# Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

## Introduction

The Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), established in 1966, manages 7,802 acres in Jackson, Jennings, and Monroe Counties of Indiana (Figure 1). The Refuge also administers nine conservation easements totaling 130.5 acres in five Indiana counties. The Refuge consists of wetland, grassland and woodland communities. The Refuge provides habitat for many avian species including ducks, geese, non-game grassland and forest birds including many neo-tropical migrants, shorebirds, wading birds, birds of prey and Wild Turkey. A wide variety of reptiles and mammals including the copperbelly water snake, Kirtland's snake, river otter, and white-tailed deer, many fish species and a broad range of terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates also inhabit the Refuge. Included among the diverse assortment of wildlife and plants found on the Refuge are several federally listed species, including the federally listed endangered Indiana bat, and many more state-listed species. Species lists found in Appendix C note any state and federal designations.

## The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Muscatatuck NWR is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). The Service is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. It oversees the enforcement of federal wildlife laws, management and protection of migratory bird populations, restoration of nationally significant fisheries, administration of the Endangered Species Act, and the restoration of wildlife habitat such as wetlands. The Service also manages the National Wildlife Refuge System.



*Great Blue Heron. Photo credit: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*

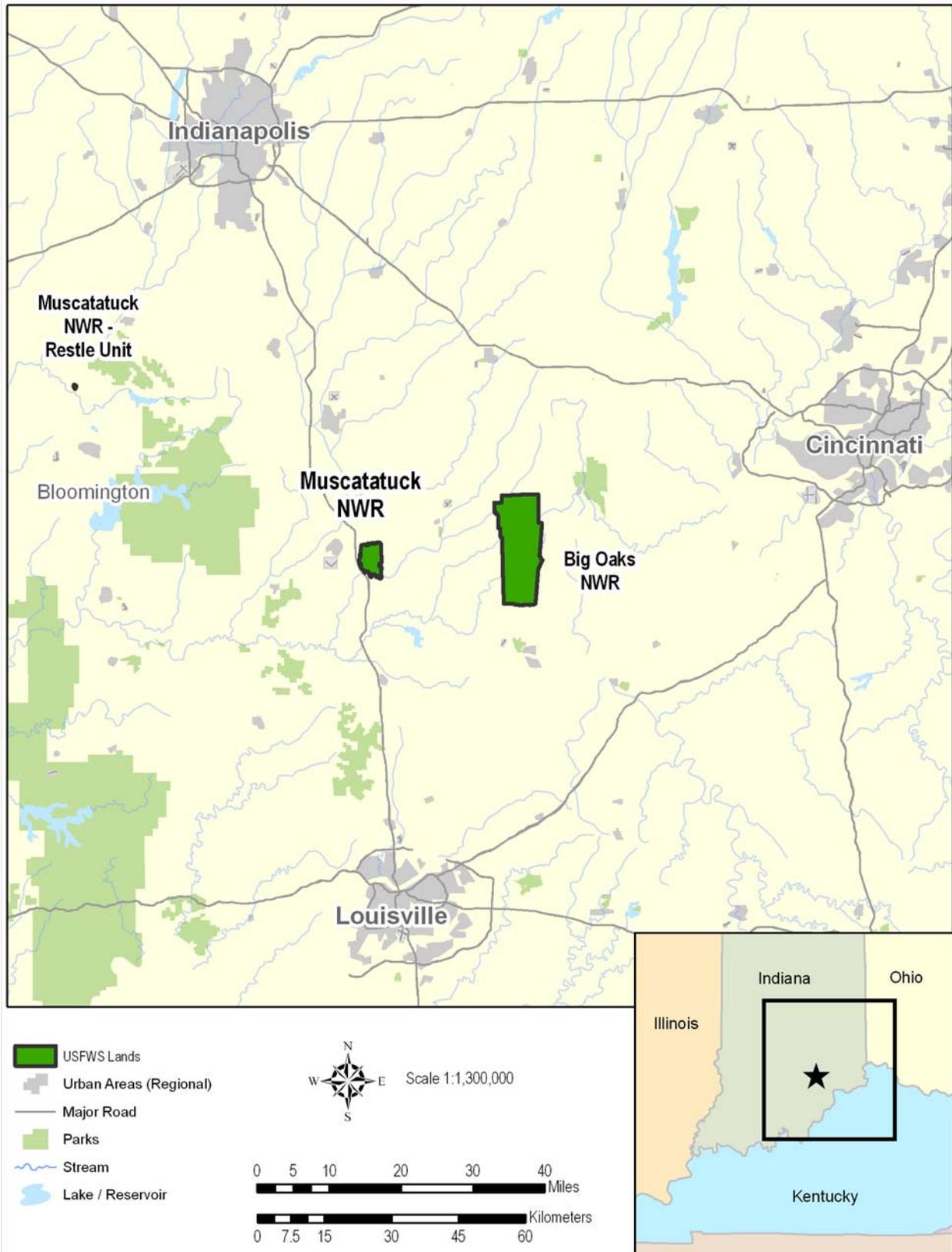
## The National Wildlife Refuge System

Refuge lands are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which was founded in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt designated Pelican Island in Florida as a sanctuary for Brown Pelicans. Today, the System is a network of about 550 refuges and 37 wetland management districts covering more than 96 million acres of public lands and waters. Most of these lands are in Alaska, with approximately 16 million acres located in the lower 48 states and several island territories.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest collection of lands specifically managed for fish and wildlife. Overall, it provides habitat for more than 5,000 species of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and insects. As a result of international treaties for migratory bird conservation and other legislation, such as the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929, many refuges have been established to protect migratory waterfowl and their migratory flyways.

Refuges also play a crucial role in preserving endangered and threatened species. Among the most notable is Aransas NWR in Texas, which provides winter habitat for the highly endangered Whooping Crane. Likewise, the Florida Panther Refuge protects one of the nation's most

**Figure 1: Location of Muscatatuck NWR**



endangered predators. Refuges also provide unique recreational and educational opportunities for people.

When human activities are compatible with wildlife and habitat conservation, refuges are places where people can enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and environmental interpretation. Many refuges have visitor centers, wildlife trails, automobile tours, and environmental education programs. Nationwide, approximately 40 million people visit national wildlife refuges every year.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 established several important mandates aimed at making the management of national wildlife refuges more cohesive. The preparation of Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs) is one of those mandates. The legislation directs the Secretary of the Interior to ensure that the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and purposes of the individual refuges are carried out. It also requires the Secretary to maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System are to:

- Conserve a diversity of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats, including species that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
- Develop and maintain a network of habitats for migratory birds, anadromous and interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammal populations that is strategically distributed and carefully managed to meet important life history needs of these species across their ranges.
- Conserve those ecosystems, plant communities, wetlands of national or international significance, and landscapes and seascapes that are unique, rare, declining, or underrepresented in existing protection efforts.
- Provide and enhance opportunities to participate in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation).



*Muscatatuck NWR. Photo Credit: Jon Kauffeld*

- Foster understanding and instill appreciation of the diversity and interconnectedness of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats.

## History and Establishment

In the early 1960s there was interest among the Indiana Department of Conservation, state-wide sportsmen and conservation organizations, and many business and civic leaders in southern Indiana for a national wildlife refuge in the area known as Mutton Creek Bottoms. Their interest was prompted by the recollection of past waterfowl use of the area, the reduction of waterfowl habitat throughout the area because of wetland drainage, an anticipated economic stimulus from tourists and sportsmen, and possible educational benefits derived from nature trails and wildlife observations.

With the approval of the Governor and support by local elected representatives, the Service presented the proposal for the Muscatatuck NWR to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission on June 7, 1966. The Commission approved the acquisition of 7,922 acres to provide duck breeding and migration habitat. Lands for the Refuge were acquired under eminent domain. The Refuge was officially established by the acquisition of the first tracts on October 6, 1966. By April 24, 1973, acquisition was considered complete with 7,724 acres acquired; interest in a remaining in-holding had waned by 1979 because the asking price was too high. The 78-acre Restle Unit in Monroe County was acquired through a donation in 1991.

## Refuge Purpose

The Refuge purpose “...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds” derives from the Migratory

Bird Conservation Act. When proposed as a refuge to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission in 1966, the area was identified as having good potential for waterfowl with expected increases in production and use during the spring and fall migrations. It was also noted that the Refuge would provide recreation facilities for the people of the vicinity.

The Refuge also manages nine conservation easement areas. The purpose of the easements, "... for conservation ...", derives from the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act. The Service administers the easements as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

## Refuge Vision

The Refuge staff considered past vision statements and emerging issues and drafted the following vision statement as the desired future state of the Refuge:

As the land of winding waters, treasured for generations, Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge honors its heritage and connects visitors with the natural environment by conserving a rich mosaic of sustainable habitat for a diversity of wildlife and plants.

## Purpose of the Plan

This CCP articulates the management direction for Muscatatuck NWR for the next 15 years. Through goals, objectives, and strategies, this CCP describes how the Refuge intends to fulfill its purpose and contribute to the overall mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Prior to the CCP, Refuge management was guided by a 1982 Master Plan, which is now dated, and other short-term plans of limited scope. There is a need for a broad, long-term look at management direction given changed conditions and scientific information, and over 40 years of on-the-ground experience by the Service managing the Refuge.

Several legislative mandates within the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 have guided the development of this plan. These mandates include:

- Wildlife has first priority in the management of refuges.

- Wildlife-dependent recreation activities, namely hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education and interpretation, are priority public uses of refuges. We will facilitate these activities when they do not interfere with our ability to fulfill the refuges' purpose or the mission of the Refuge System.
- Other uses of the Refuge will only be allowed when determined appropriate and compatible with Refuge purposes and mission of the Refuge System.

The plan will guide the management of Muscatatuck NWR by:

- Providing a clear statement of direction for the future management.
- Making a strong connection between Refuge activities and conservation activities that occur in the surrounding area.
- Providing neighbors, visitors, and the general public with an understanding of the Service's management actions.
- Ensuring Refuge actions and programs are consistent with the mandates of the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- Ensuring that Refuge management considers federal, state, and county plans.
- Establishing long-term continuity in Refuge management.
- Providing a basis for the development of budget requests on the Refuge's operational, maintenance, and capital improvement needs.

## Legal Context

In addition to the acquisition authorities of the Refuge, and the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, several federal laws, executive orders, and regulations govern its administration. Appendix E contains a partial list of the legal mandates that pertain to Refuge management and guided the preparation of this plan.