

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



News Release

Midwest Region

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Will Study Potential National Wildlife Refuge Along Wisconsin and Illinois Border

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently decided it would conduct a study to determine if the establishment of a national wildlife refuge in several counties along the Wisconsin and Illinois border between Milwaukee and Chicago would be appropriate. The area authorized for consideration includes 10,000 to 30,000 acres within the Illinois counties of Lake and McHenry and the Wisconsin counties of Kenosha, Racine and Walworth.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Acting Director Rowan Gould approved a Preliminary Project Proposal (PPP) to study the feasibility of creating what is currently being called the Proposed Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge. A PPP is the first administrative step in the process of determining if establishing of a national wildlife refuge is appropriate.

“We are very excited about working with both States and the local communities to explore the possibility of establishing a national wildlife refuge in this area,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius. “We are hoping the public will be very engaged, and we will be working with all interested partners, as we move through the planning process.”

More information on the proposed refuge and the process is available online at:
<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/planning/Hackmatack/index.html>

The process began when a group of local citizens and organizations joined together and began promoting the idea of establishing a national wildlife refuge in the area. The Governors of both states, along with local government groups and several Congressional members also requested that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service look into the possibility of establishing a national wildlife refuge.

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“Creating a Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge would ‘connect the dots’ of conserved lands in southeast Wisconsin and northern Illinois,” said Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Secretary Matt Frank. “Wisconsin is solidly behind this proposal. The new refuge could become an important boost to area economies, create new recreational opportunities in a heavily populated region, and provide an outdoor classroom for environmental education.”

“Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge has great potential to create more outdoor recreational access opportunities, promote local tourism and jobs and re-connect urban and suburban communities with their outdoor heritage, which are all priorities for the State of Illinois,” said Illinois Department of Natural Resources Director Marc Miller. “In these difficult budget times we are pleased to be able to work with our partners in conservation like the USFWS to meet our State’s goals.”

The next step in the process is to begin a detailed investigative and planning process which includes compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other applicable laws, regulations and orders. The result of this process will be either an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement which will review several possible options -- from doing nothing to establishing a refuge -- and recommend the best option. While there is not a set timeframe for completion, it is likely to take two to three years to complete the entire process.

“We are looking forward to working closely with local and state agencies, nongovernmental organizations and the public to find answers to our questions and to theirs,” added Melius. “We want to ensure we move forward in an open, thoughtful and logical manner.”

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 <http://www.fws.gov>