

Janine Catchpole
321 Marigold Place
Joliet, Illinois 60433

January 27, 2017

Jeanne Holler
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Bloomington, MN

Dear Ms. Holler

I would like to express my support of the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge & Conservation Area (Refuge). As a Montana native transplanted to Illinois, the Refuge provides not only refuge to animals and plants but a place of refuge to get away from the zoo that is the Greater Chicago area.

And having come from Montana, I know that the Refuge can be a driver of positive economic change. I think in specific of Lincoln, Montana, a small town surrounded by U.S. Forest Service and Montana State Forests. It also is an access to some of the highest quality fly fishing in the country. It could have been another dying Montana town but survives, servicing tourists from around the world.

I also think of Augusta, Montana and its role in providing gear, gas and food as well as shopping for Montana art and other gifts. It is a last stop before heading into the Rocky Mountain Front Range and the Wildlife Management Area.

In Illinois, the small town of Ashland bills itself as the gateway to the Jim Edgar Panther Creek Fish and Wildlife Area. The problem all these areas have in common is that they have a limited population base nearby to draw on.

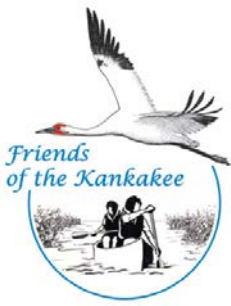
If we look at the town of Julian, California, near San Diego, we see another example of what was a dying mining town using surrounding natural resources to bring in a steady stream of visitors from southern California counties. Median income has gone up over the years.

With the Refuge so close to a major metropolitan area, I think it represents a great chance to save from sprawl the properties that willing sellers would like to see preserved for future generations. For people not willing to sell, they could put conservation easements on their property, reducing their tax burden, and again, keeping the land the way it is.

The proximity to the Chicago area can also be a burden as we have seen increasing developmental pressure that may bring intermodals, major highways and new railroads to this area. The Refuge is the antithesis of such development. It will be a great thing to see the Refuge grow, as voluntary participation allows, preserving peace and quiet for many and building economic opportunity that does not harm a way of life enjoyed by current residents.

Sincerely,

Janine Catchpole



*P.O. Box 13
Watseka, Illinois 60970*

January 30, 2017

Ref: Kankakee NWR and Conservation Area

Jeanne Holler
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Division of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning
5600 American Blvd. West, Suite 990
Bloomington, MN 55437-1458

Dear Jeanne:

As donors of the 66-acre start of the National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area, the Friends of the Kankakee are certainly anxious to see the Refuge move forward to eventual completion. We have worked hard to acquire and manage the Kolar Savanna Unit into decent shape before transferring to USFWS; it is gratifying to see this acreage used for the public benefit. We hope for similar successes in the near future.

We wholeheartedly support land acquisition from willing sellers in the focus areas as the Service has prioritized; alternatively, partnering with owners on a voluntary basis to steward wildlife habitat makes good sense, too.

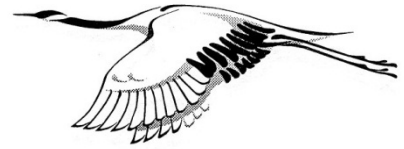
The Friends has made good progress in connecting parcels in highly-fragmented northeast Iroquois County. Linking up natural areas as the plan for the Refuge moves forward bodes well for wildlife, especially for species that are known to be area-sensitive.

It will be to the benefit of people and wildlife if the Service can help willing owners convert marginal farmland, especially that which floods regularly, into good quality wildlife habitat. This would also help to reduce flooding and improve water quality in the river. Of course we firmly support any actions that benefit all who dwell in the watershed.

Best wishes for success.

Sincerely,

Marianne L. Hahn, President



Dunes Calumet Audubon Society

January 29, 2017

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Div. of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning
5600 American Blvd. West, Suite 990
Bloomington, MN 55437-1458
Attention: Kankakee NWR and Conservation Area

Dear Ms. Holler,

The Dunes-Calumet Audubon Society (DCA) wishes to express its support for continued acquisition of land for the Kankakee NWR&CA. We are pleased that the USFWS plans to prioritize conservation of forested bottomlands and other wetlands along the river. Helping to control water runoff, improving water quality, and stabilizing the river edges will also help increase waterfowl and shore bird habitat.

The 2016 designation of the Kankakee River as a National Water Trail has increased the public's awareness of the great recreational asset we have. More canoe and kayakers are enjoying the natural river meanderings in Illinois. We would also like to bring more birders to the area. Please consider working with DCA to establish birding sites on lands you may acquire.

Sincerely,

Lynda McGinnis

President DCA
1250 Chippewa Trail
Chesterton, IN 46304

January 30, 2017

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Div. of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning
5600 American Blvd. West, Suite 990
Bloomington, MN 55437-1458

Attention: Kankakee NWR and Conservation Area

Dear Ms. Holler,

I wish to express my support for the acquisition of additional lands for the Kankakee NWR & CA. I believe the proposed Land Protection Plan, which will enlarge the footprint of the Refuge by protecting bottomlands and other wetlands in the Momence Wetlands, should help to control flooding and improve water quality of the Kankakee River, as well as, increasing recreational opportunities. I would support encouraging ag land owners to manage their marginal lands for wildlife habitat. We need to preserve as much natural areas as possible in light of the continuing land development south of Chicago. Acquiring lands from willing sellers and encouraging conservation easements should be priorities.

I would like the USFWS to increase public outreach to help build acceptance of the Refuge and help the public understand the importance of saving natural lands, I believe the open house for the Refuge demonstrated the benefit of inviting the public to activities that allow them to talk with FWS or Friends directly about their concerns. Consider giving tours which highlight special areas that provide increased recreation/protection or are important in maintaining species populations such as waterfowl, which can be hunted.

The Indiana Chapter of the Nature Conservancy faced similar public resistance when Kankakee Sands was established 20 years ago. Now, because of their public outreach; their plantings of native gardens at the fair, library, and other buildings; and their mentoring programs for staff and students from North Newton High School, they are seen as a positive benefit to the community. With the arrival of the new bison herd, even more people are enjoying the area and bringing dollars to the local community.

I would also encourage FWS to continue to focus on preserving the prairie and savanna areas adjacent to Iroquois Sands. There is a potential to increase holdings by over 400 acres, which will facilitate ecosystem restoration.

Sincerely,

Chris Salberg

7613 W. 134th Place
Cedar Lake, IN 46303



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January 29, 2017

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Division of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning
Attention: Kankakee NWR and Conservation Area
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On behalf of the Illinois Audubon Society I am writing with the following comments on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Conservation Opportunities Map for the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. The Illinois Audubon Society is a statewide conservation organization with a mission of promoting the perpetuation and appreciation of birds, wildlife, and the habitats that support them. We have over 2,000 members.

The Society commends the Service for its efforts to bring additional conservation measures to this important area, and we are happy to see the Service's efforts to engage local communities and landowners in a process that seeks to enhance and connect high quality oak savanna and grassland bird habitat in Kankakee and Iroquois County.

We are especially pleased to see the potential opportunity for additional recreational opportunities for people to watch wildlife, paddle, fish, hunt and hike that the refuge and conservation area can bring to the area.

Staff:

Dr. James Herkert
Executive Director

Jo Fessett
Assistant to the Executive Director

Jodie Owen
Accounts Manager

We also believe that the refuge and conservation area offers a great opportunity for the conservation of essential habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds, including whooping cranes.

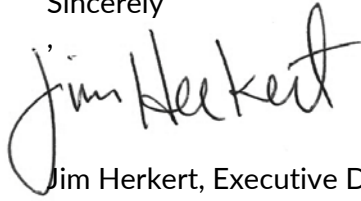
We agree with prioritizing new natural connections between the Iroquois State Wildlife Area in Illinois and the Willow Slough State Fish and Wildlife Area in Indiana as an initial focus of this effort. We also support efforts to enhance and connect important cores and corridors of wildlife habitat in the Momence Wetlands.

We also believe that this effort offers great potential, for landowners that choose to participate, to restore flood-prone farmland and marginal agricultural land to wildlife habitat.

In closing the Illinois Audubon Society is very happy to see the Service initiate conservation efforts in the area in way that is inclusive of local communities and landowners and one that focuses on working with willing landowners to bring important conservation measures to the area.

We look forward to working with the Service further as the planning for this refuge and conservation area progress.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Herkert". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jim Herkert, Executive Director
The Illinois Audubon Society
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