



PRAIRIE STATE CONSERVATION COALITION

Making Conservation Land Trusts Stronger



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

Ms. Jeanne Holler:

The *Prairie State Conservation Coalition* ("PSCC") welcomes this opportunity to express support for the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. PSCC is the Illinois association of conservation land trusts, which work with private landowners and public partners across the state to protect, restore, and steward our diverse natural heritage.

PSCC sees public/private partnerships as critical to expanding conservation reach, connecting high-quality sites, and working within communities to build local support for conservation. Much of our work as a coalition supports cooperation to build natural connections, such as to support migratory birds whose populations are in steep decline. We agree with prioritizing new natural connections between the Iroquois State Wildlife Area and the Willow Slough State Fish and Wildlife Area in Indiana. We would also like to see a corridor to connect the Momence and Kankakee conservation areas.

The Refuge will offer increased recreational opportunities for people to watch wildlife, paddle, fish, hunt and hike, fostering connections to nature and integrating conserved natural areas into the existing fabric of our human communities, working lands and local economies. We suggest reaching out to communities with metrics on how the Refuge will be a strong economic driver, and discuss the ecosystems services value of open space as a financial benefit for the local area.

PSCC believes that the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge Land Protection Plan will support connections at all levels in order to expand conservation in the region and build community support for the refuge. Thank you for the opportunity to express support.

Emy Brawley
President, Board of Directors
Prairie State Conservation Coalition



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Karen L. Prenal, Esq.

January 31, 2017

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Comments to Conservation Opportunities Map for the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area.

Dear U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

This is in response to your request for comment on the Conservation Opportunities Map for the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area.

- (1) I support the establishment and expansion of the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area by purchasing land from willing sellers. It is important for public access to natural areas to allow all people to enjoy nature and engage in outdoor recreation.
- (2) I strongly agree with the Conservation Map's emphasis on conserving wetlands and forested bottomlands. Wetlands provide vital services to our planet by filtering water and reducing flooding. If the Service can convert marginal farmland into a rich wetland through buying land from willing sellers, I believe that is a good use of tax dollars. The map's emphasis on connecting existing conservation lands with the Refuge is logical. Connecting these conservation areas will provide more habitat for migratory birds and other animals.
- (3) I strongly support conserving rare black oak savannas and other habitats on the map that support threatened and endangered species. We must preserve these habitats and species for future generations. While private owners can certainly preserve habitat and steward land, I value publicly-owned land that is accessible to all.

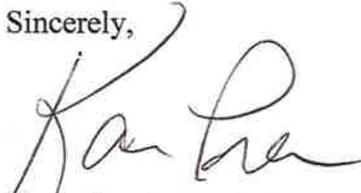
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- (4) I encourage the Service to highlight on the map that land will only be bought from willing sellers, and that the public will have access to Refuge land.

- (5) Also, as funds allow, I feel the Service should build and staff a Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area Welcome Center so visitors can assess restrooms and water. I encourage the Service to continue meeting with the local community that will be impacted by the Refuge. I believe that the Service and local communities can work together towards the goal of protecting both the environment and the community's interests. I encourage the Service to work with the community so that any eco-tourists are aware of locally-owned businesses that would welcome more customers.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input as the USFWS develops its Land Protection Plan for the Kankakee Refuge.

Sincerely,



Karen Lee Prena, P.C.

KLP:jdc

